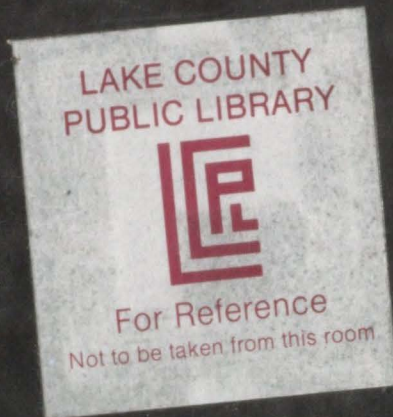


A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF MERRILLVILLE

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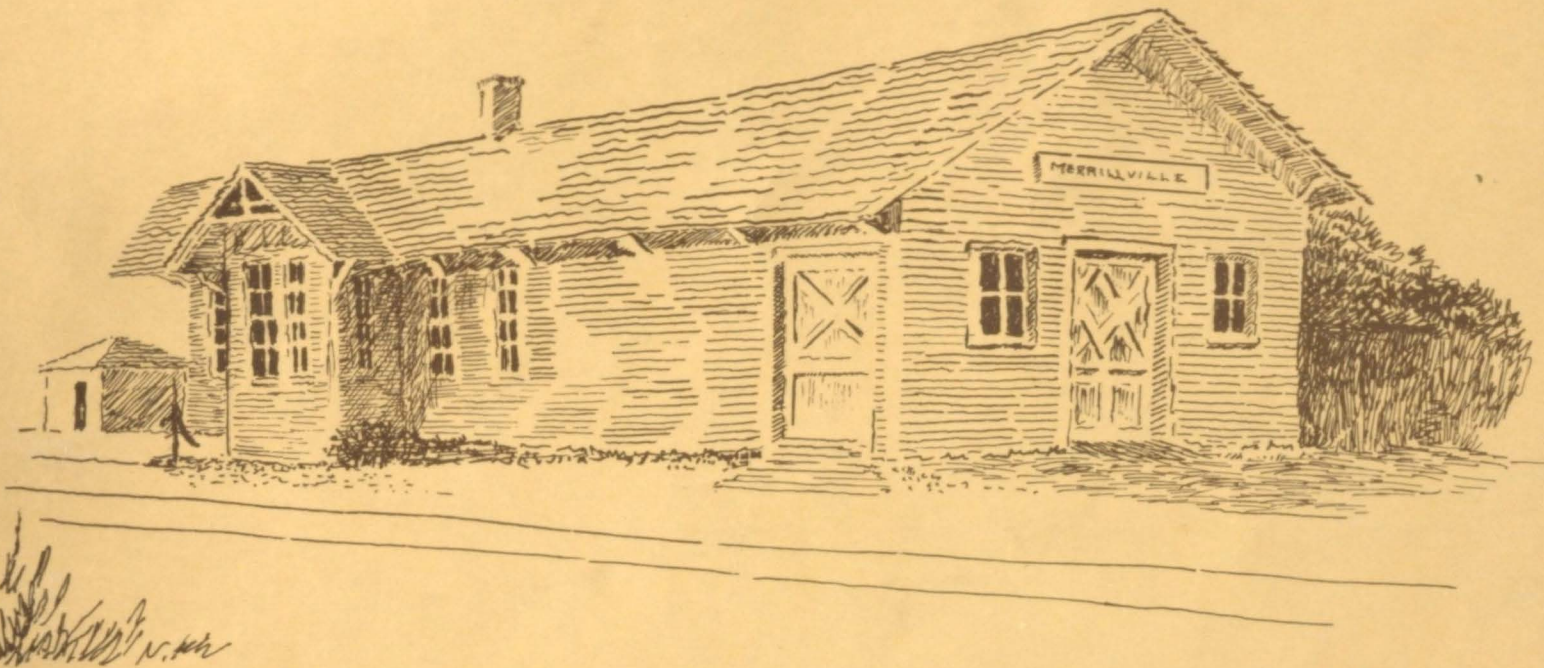






# A PICTORIAL HISTORY OF MERRILLVILLE

STORIES, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF PIONEER BUILDINGS



JANETTE M. CLEMENS  
DEBORAH COLLINS



**A  
Pictorial History  
of  
Merrillville**



**A  
Pictorial History  
of  
Merrillville**

**With Stories, Photographs, and Illustrations  
of Pioneer Buildings Since 1847**

*by*

*Janette M. Clemens*

*Deborah Collins*

**A Ross Township Historical Society**

**Bi-Centennial Project**

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Grateful acknowledgment to the Ross Township Historical Society for sponsoring this book.

To the librarians, particularly Marilyn Jefferies, whose invaluable assistance saved the authors countless hours of research time and to Lois Gartner, whose willingness to assist was most helpful.

To the considerate lifelong residents of Merrillville who shared their reminiscences of days gone by with us and so enriched our appreciation of our task.

To Mr. Harry Calpha, who graciously offered to proofread this text, and to Mrs. Calpha who assisted Mr. Calpha.

To John A. Clemens Sr. for his enduring patience with us while we disrupted his home routine to meet a deadline.

To John A. Clemens Jr., who was a lot of help.

To all these, we express our deepest gratitude and sincere appreciation.



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## INTRODUCTION

The intention of the authors is to recapture a feeling of Merrillville's past, to recreate an atmosphere of the times that have spawned our present. The idea, which had its inception in a project undertaken by Mrs. Clemens and her ninth grade art class, is particularly appropriate in this year that marks the two-hundreth birthday of our nation. All over the country people are looking to their past, re-examining the events that led them to their present and paying homage to the thousands of individuals whose efforts have enabled them to enjoy a plenitude of benefits today. It is highly fitting that we too turn our attention to those who came before us, to acknowledge their hard work, learn from their mistakes, and marvel at our progress. Those brave pioneers laid a foundation on which we are still building. Only by looking backward can we hope to understand the enormity of the obstacles they had to overcome and thus be reassured that we can handle the difficulties of the present and rise to the challenges of the future.

Within the pages of this book will be found hand drawn illustrations as well as actual photographs of old buildings in our area, many of which are not only still standing, but are also familiar landmarks to town residents. Many of the houses are of historical interest—all of them are of human interest, and in keeping with this idea, the authors have tried to reconstruct something of the personalities connected with these buildings. With some of the pictures there'll be a synopsis of the family history; with others a description of the activities that went on under the roof and behind the walls. Wherever possible, anecdotes and small vignettes are incorporated into the text in the hope of gaining some insight into the character of these people. It is hoped that the reader, through the use of the drawings and verbal pictures, will be able to feel the history of the area; and that the significance of these buildings will come alive for them. The structures are not just old curiosities to be appreciated for their longevity, they are stages on which human dramas were enacted. They all bore silent witness to births, marriages, and deaths. Within their confines, dreams were dreamed, arguments raged, plots were hatched, and plans for the future were made. They have all seen their share of laughter and tears.

The authors do not claim to be experts on architecture nor on history, for that matter. We are merely citizens with an appreciation for what has come before us and with a desire to see it carefully preserved. Many of our sources are unimpeachable, such as newspaper articles, monographs, and church records, but our richest source of information, the memories of the people of Merrillville, is not one hundred



percent reliable. This is not to say that these pages are riddled with misinformation, but rather to concede the possibility of error despite the fact that corroboration for details was sought in every instance. Though some coldly objective author of a scholarly tome may scorn our efforts as amateurish, we are proud, (and justly so, we feel) that our reconstruction of the past has a dimension to which no textbook could lay claim. Our history has a warmth, a feeling, and sense of human drama. It was not cold, hard fact that sustained our predecessors through the trials of inclement weather, deprivation, illness, loneliness, ad infinitum. It was feeling, hope, optimism, confidence, and faith that here was their pot at the end of the rainbow if they could only hold on to it. Some gave in to despair and rushed back to the cradling arms of the then more "civilized" East Coast; others pushed on in search of new challenges; still others stayed and made a go of it. This book is a tribute to their tenacity and and their strength of spirit.

The authors also do not pretend that this history is complete. Time and space limitations do not permit as thorough and detailed description as we would have liked. It is our intention to follow this with a more completely documented version. We hope we will be forgiven our sins of omission, for this is an ambitious project, and "the lines had to be drawn somewhere." This book does not recount the deeds of nationally known historical personages, but rather of persevering pioneer families and the structures they built. Buildings and individuals were selected for inclusion according to several criteria, including relative importance, availability of information, and general interest to the reading public. This is not to say that if any family was excluded, they were unimportant, or boring. More than likely, they were omitted due to lack of information in the interest of accuracy. We estimate that many thousands of hours of research need to be completed for the larger publication.

We should like to provide you with some background material that will enhance your understanding and appreciation of the sketches that follow.

There is apt to be some confusion surrounding the myriad of names that have been applied to our town, which having been established as Merrillville in December of 1971, is reputed to be the largest and fastest growing town in Indiana. First let's delineate the area under discussion and then clarify the nomenclature.

Merrillville encompasses some thirty-one square miles of land that was once covered densely with forest. Its gently rolling topography lends itself easily to cultivation, and blessedly the soil is fertile. The area is drained by Turkey



Creek and Deep River, and there's no lack of rainfall. The boundaries, for the purpose of the book, run from the business section to West 73rd, along U.S. 30 to Deep River (and in and around various sideroads set back from the main highway) north to 61st Street (Porter County Line,) west approaching the St. John County Line, and east toward Hobart.

The entire area was once the province of the Pottawatomie Indians, a nation of hunters and fishermen, who were quite peaceloving. In 1834 a clearing in the woodland used for ceremonial purposes went by the name of McGwinn's Village. A year later a white man by the name of Jeremiah Wiggins swooped down on the village and overcame the Indians with his gift of gab and fascinating trinkets. McGwinn's Village thus became Wiggins Point, and under that name became a well known stop for wagon trains bound for Joliet. At one time some sixteen different roads (trails is the more accurate description) radiated outward from Wiggins Point. Sometime after Wiggins' death in 1838 the settlers who had followed him there decided that Centerville would be a more appropriate name. Later still, after the Merrill brothers had made their imprint on community life, Centerville became Merrillville.

Other settlements had been mushrooming on the former Pottawatomie hunting grounds, and they were given names such as Deep River and Turkey Creek (from the waterways they bordered,) Ainsworth, Lottaville (which was at one time a post office address), and Rexville. In 1848, all of these settlements, including Merrillville, were collected under the name of Ross Township. In 1971 the designation Merrillville was applied to everything included under the former Ross Township. So Merrillville applies to two different entities, the whole amalgamation of settlements and to a specific part of that union, namely to one settlement that originated as McGwinn Village. Thus when the reader encounters Turkey Creek, for example, in the text, he should properly regard it as a section of present day Merrillville or alternatively as a sister settlement of the former use of Merrillville.

The reader will notice that the majority of the houses are built on the same basic plan, that is, in the form of a two-story high temple with a lateral wing. Yet they were all affected in an individual manner by their builders and subsequent owners that makes them unique. Some of the homes are no longer standing. Others have been so drastically altered so as not to resemble the original in the slightest detail. In most cases, the accompanying illustrations depict the structure in its original state and a listing of the modifications is included to help the reader identify the present day structure.



The alert reader will notice the recurrence of certain themes, for instance, the evolution of building materials utilized in construction of homes. Many early settlers relied on hastily thrown together log shelters. Later more suitable residences were constructed from the most readily available materials, wood and fieldstone. Decades later the family member occupying the ancestral home may have built a modern brick residence or may have updated the faithful frame house with new siding. The history of the Catholic Church is quite illustrative of this sequence of events.

Another theme that pervades the most of the stories is the importance of farming, as with the building materials, there's a time dependent progression. Initially everyone in the area farmed. Every family raised its own food. Improved methods gave the next generation more free time, and we see the development of combination doctor-farmers, statesman-farmers, trustee-farmers, etc. Further improvements led to higher crop yeilds requiring fewer growers, and freed still more people for other pursuits, leaving the art of agriculture in the hands of those who loved it best and who performed it most successfully.

It is our hope that these stories will be informative, educational, and at times entertaining. Moreover, we would like to think of our narrative as an incentive to trips "down memory lane." Hopefully, as a result of jogging memories, there'll be lots of occasions on which families will sit down together and reminisce and share their childhood experiences with their children and grandchildren. We hope that you enjoy the book as much as we enjoyed researching, writing, and illustrating it.



## POPP HOMESTEAD

To many people the old homes of Ross Township go unnoticed. It is our hope that the association of a history with the buildings will remedy that situation by enhancing the reader's appreciation of these well built structures. Many of the histories trace several generations of occupancy by the founding family and end with the home being sold outside the family to initiate a new history.

Some stories recount years of struggle and proud passage of land and buildings from father to son only to have the home meet an ignominious end at the hands of vandals or demolished in the name of progress or razed by the Fire Department because of neglect. Happily we have uncovered a story that is particularly interesting because it involves the return of a homestead to its founding lineage. The family in question is the Popp family and the home is to be found on what is today Madison Street.

The Popp saga begins with the arrival of Andrew and Margaret (Wener) Popp and their four children to this area from Germany in 1845. They staked a claim on land that borders Madison Street and constructed a log cabin. While living there, the Pops were blessed by the birth of two more children, one of which, Andrew Jr. built the house in the illustration.

Andrew grew up on this farm but left it temporarily after his marriage to Susan Weis. He returned to run it and stayed on it until his death in 1921. After his decease the land was divided up among his children, and son Edward inherited his father's house, which he maintained for several years. Then came the Great Depression, and hard times and scarcity of money forced him to give up the house. George Waltz purchased the nine room dwelling and it became the home of his parents, Joe and Rose, and daughters Ann and Almira. After Almira's marriage Ann moved away, and the house stood vacant for twenty years. Though George Waltz diligently cared for the grounds, the house, soundly built as it was, began to deteriorate from disuse.

Fortuitously in the early spring of 1975, Robert Vlasic and his bride, who are very much fascinated by old homes, purchased this old house and Robert just happens to be the great grandson of Andrew Jr. Robert with the aid of his father Joseph Vlasic, has been hard at work in the last year repairing, renovating and partially restoring the old structure. The original five upstairs bedrooms have been transformed into three larger bedrooms and a bath. A furnace has been installed to take over the heating job of the two stoves once located in the kitchen and the parlor. The nineteenth century building even has running water now. Interestingly during the process of tearing out the walls, Robert found lumber bills amounting to \$225.00. Two large loads of wood were hauled by wagon from Chicago, Illinois, to build the house in 1880.





Albert and Clara Popp

Albert, son of Andrew and Susan (Wise) Popp, was united in marriage to Clara Doffin in 1921. His wedding life has been blessed by four children-Barbara Spurr, Sheldon, Audrey Kordys, and Thelma Saberniak. He was formerly employed as Superintendent for the Lake County Highway for twenty-five years and at the same time served as precinct committee man. He is now retired from public life.





Andrew and Susan (Wise) Popp-center front  
and seven of their children.  
Mary (Vonderheid), Margaret (Schmidt), Albert, Edward, Andrew,  
Frank, and Charles.



The Vlasics hope to recapture the original appearance of the exterior of the house and expect to complete the project very soon. (Prabably before the publishing of this book.) Great Grandfather Popp would be extremely proud of them and we applaud their efforts.



POPP  
HOUSE

SCHNABEL HOMESTEAD

Near Colorado Street on 61st Avenue, just a half mile from the Sykes farm, are what used to be the lands of the Schnabels, whose names were well known in Ross Township in the early nineteenth century. Several homes were built on the large estate, the oldest of which was the home of the progenitor of the Schnabel family in Ross Township, John Schnabel.

The accompanying illustration reveals the home to be typical of farmhouses of that period, though this one was considerably larger than most. The downstairs was sectioned into a parlor, dining room kitchen, pantry and two bedrooms. The kitchen was heated by the cooking stove, and the parlor had a potbellied stove in it expressly for the purpose of keeping that room warm. Upstairs there were to be found five bedrooms on either side of a long center hall that extended the length of the house. What the picture does not show is that a cool clear stream meandered past the tree shaded house and that the landscaping included huge lilac bushes and a variegated flower garden.

During its 110 years of existence the house was occupied by four generations of the Schnabel family. First was John Schnable, a native of Germany, who came to America to seek his fortune, settling initially in Pennsylvania, then moving on farther west, he located in Ross Township in 1848 on this land.



After John's retirement, son Fred, who had been born and raised on the farm, but had left after his marriage to take up residence in a smaller home across the road, returned to the large house and took over the management of the farm. Fred's parents moved into the smaller house that Fred had vacated and there they remained until their deaths.

All of Fred's children were born in the large house and after his death in 1901, one of them namely, Fred Jr. took over the reins of management, and all but one of his children were born in the ancestral home.

Fred Jr. died young in 1928 and his widow moved to Hobart, Indiana, leaving possession of the estate in the hands of their son Ralph. Ralph, who married Ruth Blim of Crown Point, Indiana, occupied the house for 33 years and was the last Schnabel to reside there. In 1961, he sold the farm and relocated to a comfortable old dwelling in Crown Point that has been in the Blim family for many years. Also in 1961, the large two-story home that had seen the birth of four generations of Schnabels was torn down to make room for the modern brick home that stands in its place today.



Schnabel Homestead



## OLD CALIFORNIA EXCHANGE HOTEL

As networks of thoroughfares were cut out of countryside formerly accessible only by paths, there grew a need for way stations to relieve the discomfort of long distance travel. A host of inns and taverns sprang up along stage routes to meet the demand. One such establishment was the Old California Exchange Hotel of Merrillville, Indiana, erected in 1842 along the stage route that had been established along the Old Sauk Trail (73rd Avenue) from Ft. Dearborn (Chicago) to Crown Point.

Travel in those days was uncomfortable, to say the least. A day's journey may have been no more than 10-25 miles but those were hard miles on bumpy dirt roads, full of ruts and strewn with rocks in a cramped "coach" that lacked shock absorbers and had poor suspension. Moreover the seats were often unpadded. When the coach was filled to capacity, passengers were forced to sit shoulder to shoulder and had to endure each other's flopping around as the vehicle swayed and rocked. It might also happen that one person would subject his fellow travelers to some unpleasant personal habit, like smoking malodorous cigars, an activity that added new dimensions in unpleasantness in the poorly ventilated carriage. It seemed that those windows did more to let in the choking dust churned up by the horses and the wheels than to let out clouds of smoke.

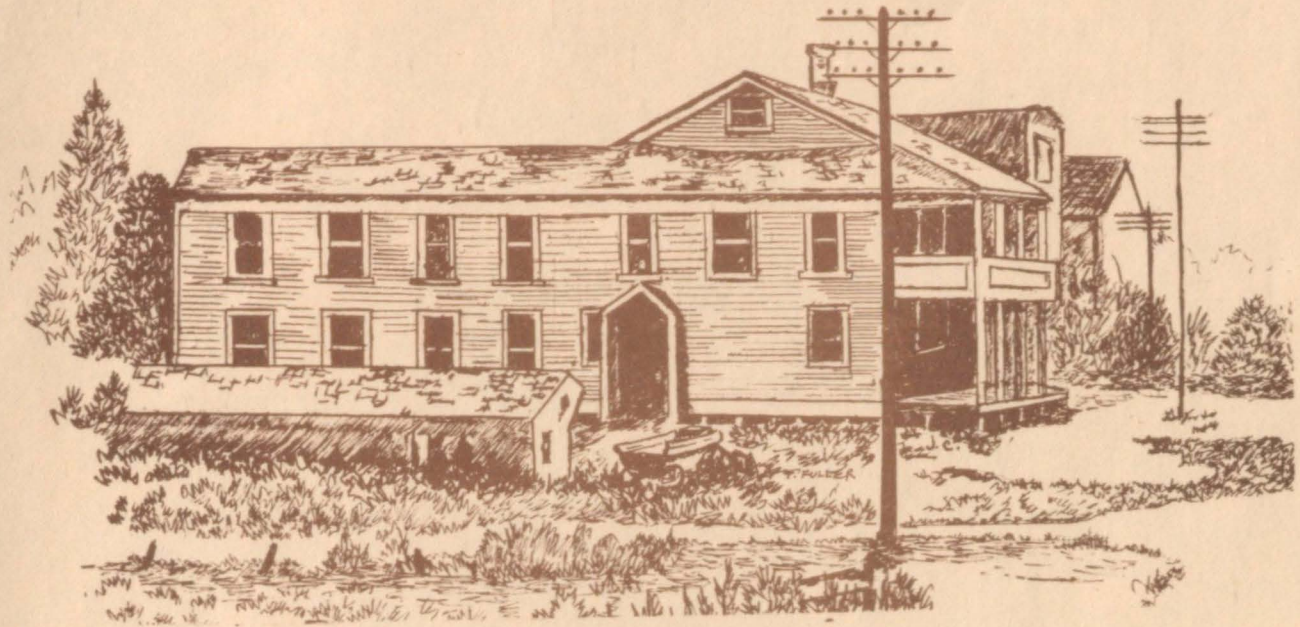
It is no wonder that these inns were a welcome sight to dust encrusted, perspiration soaked travelers who craved food, drink, bath and a comfortable bed in which to rest their bruised backsides. California Hotel Proprietor Myiel Pierce saw there was a profit to be made from servicing these simple needs.

The Old Hotel was originally a house, in fact the first house in town. It was a large frame structure with a double tiered porch. Various additions were made to it as the inn changed hands over the years; for instance, the back section was built when the hotel started renting rooms upstairs.

The Hotel also had facilities for the travel worn horses. The drivers could groom and feed the horses and let them rest for the night. Moreover the Hotel served as a mail drop; that is, the stage delivered local mail to the proprietor, and townspeople would come to him to claim their letters.

Originally the Hotel did not have a bar. When one was added, the Hotel became a big draw for the natives as well as the wayfarers. Townspeople would gather there and perhaps enlivened by the spirits they drank, hold heated political debates. Others might discuss grain prices and cattle raising and still others might be content to just sit and while away the hours over a mug of ale.





The California Exchange Hotel

Pictured on page 8 is the building that replaced the old California Exchange Hotel, which had been destroyed by fire in 1910. This structure, built in 1912, serviced the town as restaurant and hotel under many managers and many names including Christy's Eat Shop. In 1942 this building was also claimed by fire as unchecked deterioration forced razing of the safety hazard by the Fire Department.



The Hotel changed hands several times. Three of its owners were Thomas Hoffman (around 1855), Daniel Sawyer (around 1860), and George Elbert (1895). Unfortunately, fire ravaged the inn in 1910, putting an end to more than half a century of Hoosier Hospitality. In its time this stage route rest station had offered a respite from the hardships of travel to immigrants coming to settle here and to adventurers who were moving on, like the 49ers on their way to the California gold fields.



#### JOHANN HEIN HOUSE

Johann Hein was a German emigrant who came to this country around 1860. At first he settled in Chicago, but later he and brother Peter relocated in Ross Township to lend their carpentry and masonry talents to the housebuilding boom then going on in the community.

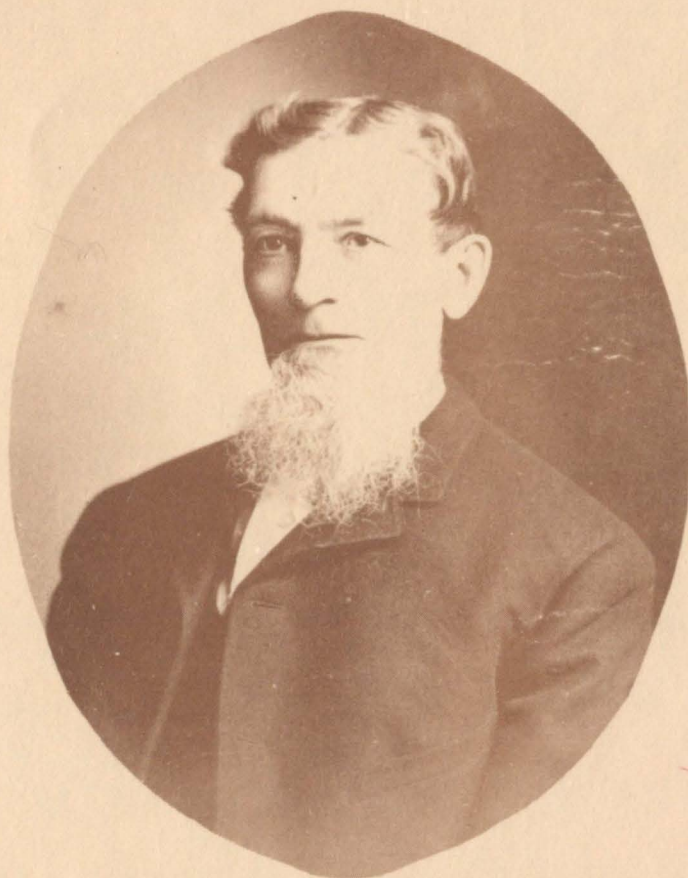
In 1881 Johann built a home for his own family on the northeast side of the Grand Trunk Railroad tracks off Madison Street. The house had nine large rooms, a pantry with ample storage space, a summer kitchen and front and back porches..certainly adequate and comfortable accommodations for the five Hein children and the hired help.

Son Joseph took over the house after Johann's death in 1907. He bought out his siblings' shares of the farm and lived on the land for thirty years. In 1937 failing health induced Joseph to take up residence in Crown Point and rent out his farm. Tenant Emory Baker (now deceased) worked the land for





Margaretha  
(Hoffman)  
Hein



Johann  
Hein



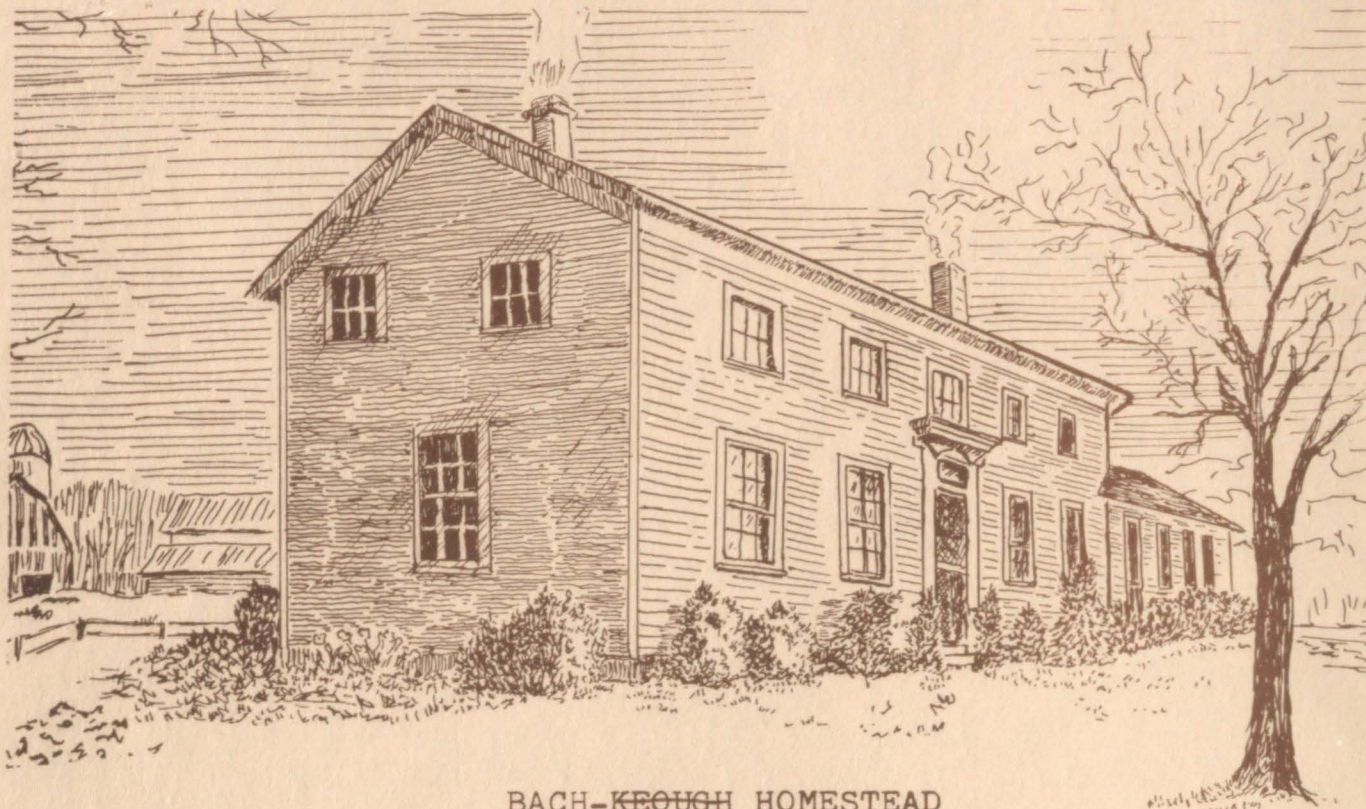
six years, then he retired. Joseph died in 1940 and nephew George Hein and wife Matilda purchased the land in 1942 and moved into the house in 1943 when Baker vacated. George and Matilda lived in Johann's house for five years at which, time they built a brick home just north of the structure they had been living in. Later George had Johann's old home moved across the tracks, so that the house now stands southeast of the tracks.

The years have seen many changes, including removal of the back section of the house, and several owners. The house is currently owned and occupied by John and Betty Lou Erdelles.



Pictured above are the five children of Johann and Margaretha Hein. Left to right: Peter, Christine, John, Barbara, and Joseph. The two small children in the buggy are Johann's grandchildren, Francis and Willard.





BACH-KEOUGH HOMESTEAD  
Kuchl

In the year 1846, Gottlob Bach left his homeland, Germany to seek a new life in America. He settled on a forty acre farm on the north side of what is presently U.S. 30. At that time however there was only a very narrow dirt road hollowed out of the fields by the passage of wagons.

Initially Gottlob erected a log cabin to shelter his family until a more suitable home was built in 1857. The spacious, federal style residence harks back to times when the home was the stage for all of life's dramas-births, marriages, and deaths.

The twelve-room house was constructed to provide living quarters for two families. A large, wide hall separated Gottlob from son Carl Wilhelm and his wife, who occupied the other half. There were even two distinct cellars although there was a common entrance to the cellars in the floor of a brick room that was connected to the house.

The structure was roomy and eight foot ceilings further accentuated the feeling of space. There was no elaborate detail to the design. The house is remarkable for its sturdy construction-built to serve the families well and for the arrangement that allowed families to live together yet apart-reassuringly close yet able to find privacy when it was needed. Two concessions to adornment were to be found in the house-

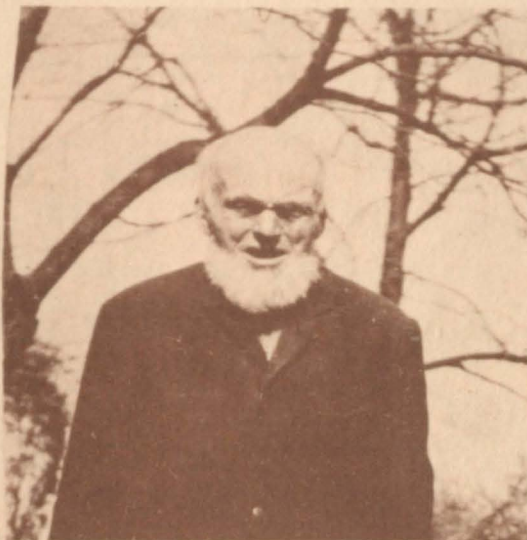


a beautiful railing on the hall staircase and the carpets that lined the house. With typical German penchant for cleanliness, Mrs. Bach untacked those carpets each spring for cleaning and placed fresh straw under them for padding.

Gottlob Bach died in 1883, leaving an unusual will regarding the disposition of his house. "I give, devise and bequeath to my wife Louise Henrietta Bach the use of the west half of our house where we live now, for and during her natural life together with the use of the cellar of said part of the house, also privileges of well, cistern and outhouses connected with the homestead. The west half of the house after her death, I bequeath to my son Carl Wilhelm Bach."

In 1920 Gottlob's granddaughter, Henrietta and her husband Henry Keough, bought the house and reared their six children there. <sup>Kuehl</sup>No Keough descendants including three daughters, Mrs. Blanche Blum, Mrs. Lydia Baker, and Mrs. Lillian Butcher, who still live in the area, occupy the house as the house was sold in 1946 and passed out of family ownership.

Carl Wilhelm Bach



Anna Bach



#### BALZAR FRANZ HOMESTEAD

Balzar Franz came to America from Germany in 1843. At the age of 23, he left home and became gainfully employed driving cattle to Chicago markets and working on other people's farms until he could amass enough capital to purchase his own land... which he did around 1860. Eventually Balzar made a prosperous dairy farm of his holdings and accumulated 500 acres. An eight room, two-story home was





built on the property to accommodate his family of nine children and the hired help.

The building, which is structurally sound and has well withstood the strains of time, is located at 6825 Taft Street formerly called Cleveland Avenue. When Balzar built the house, no road passed in front of it. There was, however, a wagon path that ran east of the house, i.e. behind it.

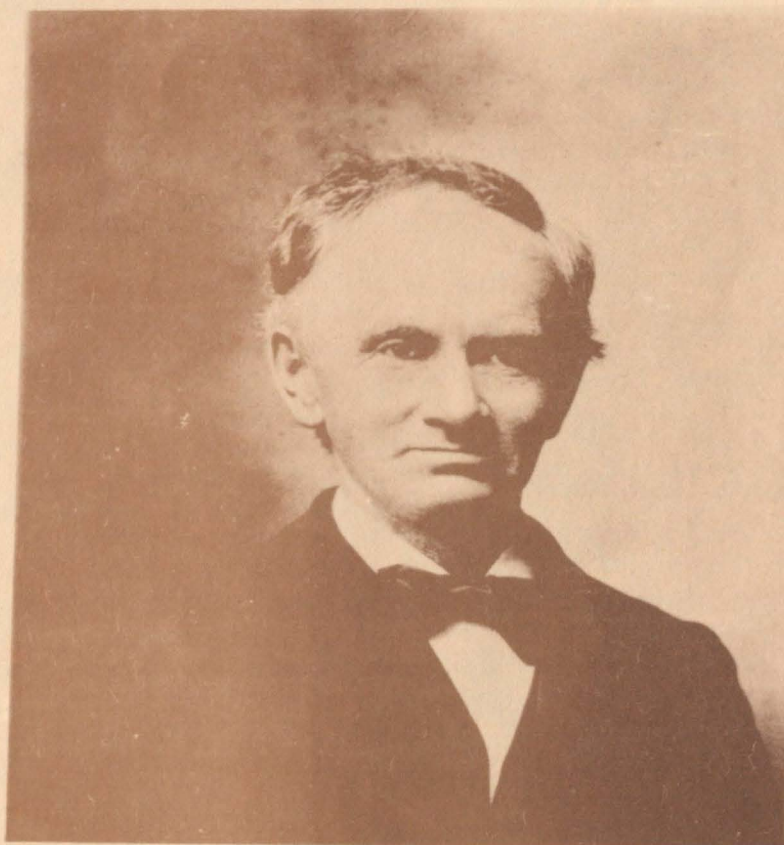
Like other houses of the time, a potbellied stove heated the kitchen and dining room; and radiators in the floors above the stove allowed the heat to rise to the bedrooms. The living room never was heated, merely closed off in the winter months. The house was wired for electricity in 1925.

When Balzar died, all of his children received a share of his property. Son George bought out his brothers' and sisters' shares, and he and his wife, Lucille (Demmon) Franz, worked the farm until George's death, at which time Lucille sold the land. The Gary Country Club is located on part of their old farm land. The house is currently owned and occupied by George and Helen Balog.





Left:  
Wedding picture  
of  
George and Lucille  
Franz



Right: Balzar  
Franz



## CARRIAGE HOUSE

The Carriage House, located at the busy intersection of 73rd and Madison, and surrounded by other business enterprises, once was a fashionable town house.

The building was erected in 1878 amid other such townhouses and is depicted in the illustration as an oblong, two-story frame house with a low pitched gable roof. A particularly distinctive feature that set this house apart from its neighbors was the design of the attractive front door. Recessed window panels on either side of the door were bordered by wide lintels, and this combination gave the illusion of breadth to the door. A large porch spanned one side of the house, and its facing the street orientation provided the family with ample opportunity for people watching, a favorite pastime. Another noteworthy characteristic still evident today on the remodeled dwelling is the scalloped trim on the gable, simple by many standards, though considered quite stylish at that time.

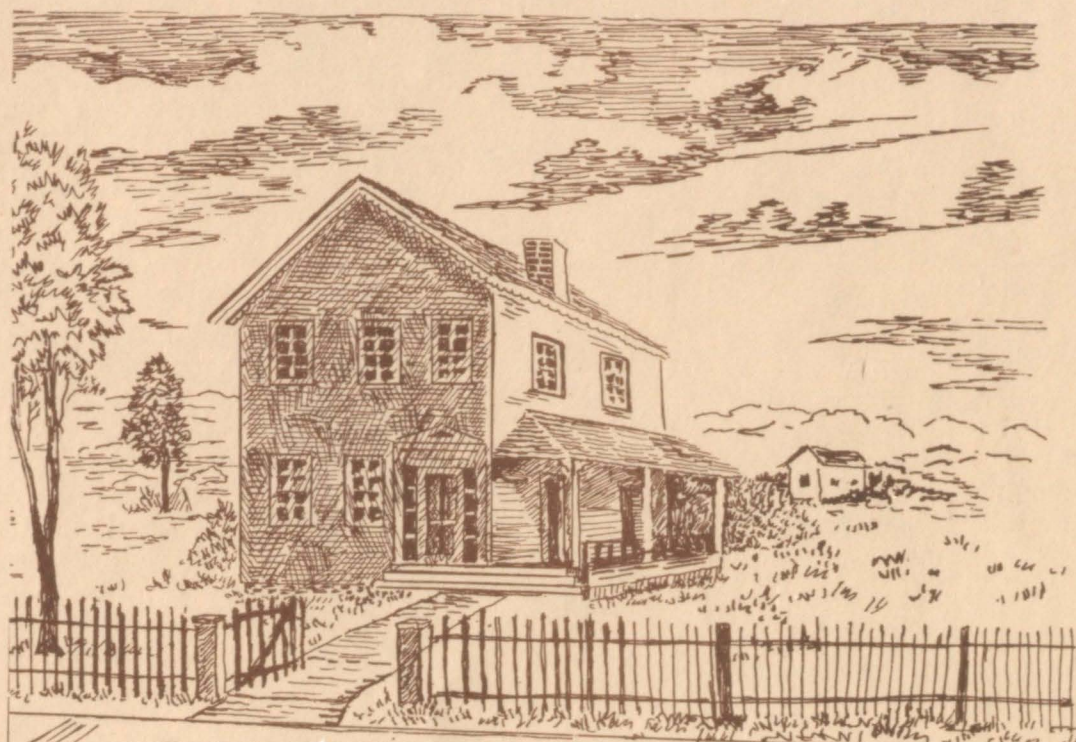
The builder of the house was George T. Randolph, who was associated with what might be termed the town's elite, i.e. those families that were well-to-do and influential in the community. George's sisters and brothers and his children sought their marriage partners among such as the Merrills, Pierces, Woods, etc...all first families of Merrillville. George himself was married to the proud and beautiful Caroline Woods, daughter of Bartlett Woods, one of the most important figures in all of Lake County. Even if one could not ascertain the Randolphs' station in life from their lineage, one would surely take the clue from the picket fence Caroline had surrounding her well landscaped yard that abounded with fragrant flowers. Such a fence was considered a "mark of aristocracy" in those days.

Somewhere around the turn of the century, the Randolphs sold their home and took up residence in Hammond, Indiana, where they lived several years until they retired to Crown Point, Indiana.

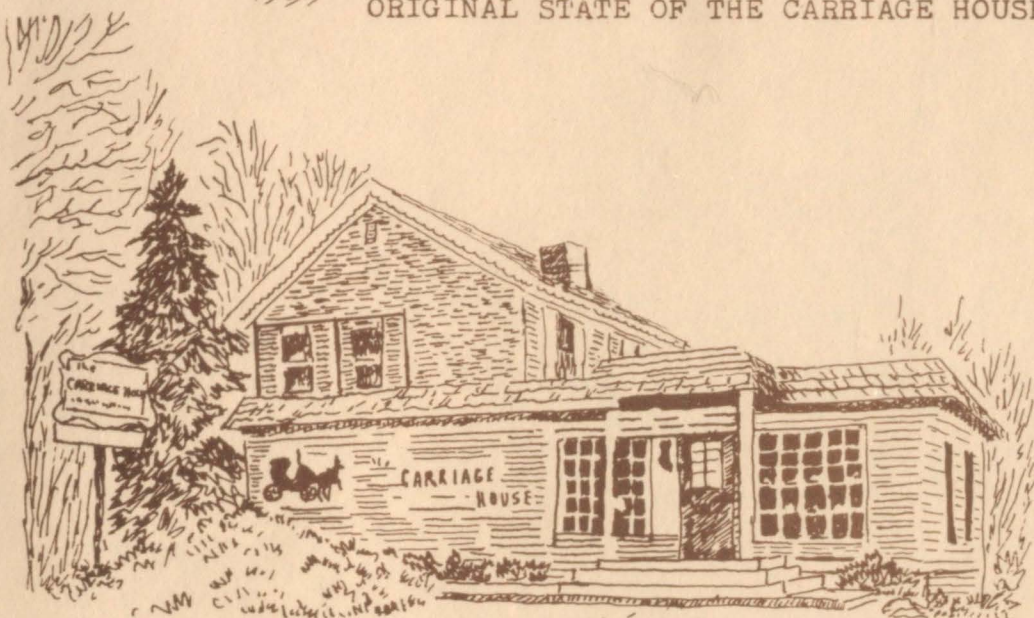
The next occupants of the house known to the authors, were Charles and Nettie Niksch, who were retiring to town from years of farm life, and purchased the home in 1905. The couple enjoyed some eleven years of town living until Charles' death in 1916 at the age of 53. Nettie, without benefit of social security and welfare programs (as they had not yet been established), found employment as a practical nurse tending to the needs of others until 1930, when failing health forced the heretofore strong and determined woman to leave her home to accept the ministrations of others in a nursing home, where she died in 1942.



In 1968 Mr. and Mrs. Harry Brown of Crown Point, purchased the house to accommodate their growing business. The building, now remodeled, is open to the public as a florist and gift shop. The accompanying illustrations give an idea of the appearance of the house now and at the turn of the century.



ORIGINAL STATE OF THE CARRIAGE HOUSE



CARRIAGE HOUSE





Nettie Niksch



Phillips Family  
 Front row: Alfred, William, and Carrie  
 Back row: Harold, Hulda, Elinor, and Walter  
 1919





Pictured above are Alfred's parents and brothers.  
Front Row: Alfred, his parents-George and Elinor,  
Edward, Back row: Henry, William, Daniel, Francis.

#### PHILLIPS FARMHOUSE

Until a few months ago, there stood on the southeast corner of Old Lincoln Highway and Whitcomb Road, a weather worn two-story frame dwelling, built in 1885. The house had been vacant for some time and was in a run down state. The musty building with its cracked plastered walls and sagging floors and roof was no longer of interest to its owner. The house now is a heap of rotting timber beneath the old oak trees which surround it.

Pictured in this book is the house in its prime. The illustration resembles a Renoir setting in which the figures, infused by a flickering light effect, appear to hesitate momentarily to glance at their viewers. Any second Alfred Phillips will move on with his horse to take up the tasks of the day. And the children will continue to play in the cool shade of the oak trees while Carrie takes time to sun her youngest child in the warm sun.

Today the setting is much the same. Open corn fields and massive oak trees still encircle the site. The family members, of course, have long since moved on and the house is a pile of rubble. One wonders what stories the trees could tell as they've stood mute witnesses over the years.

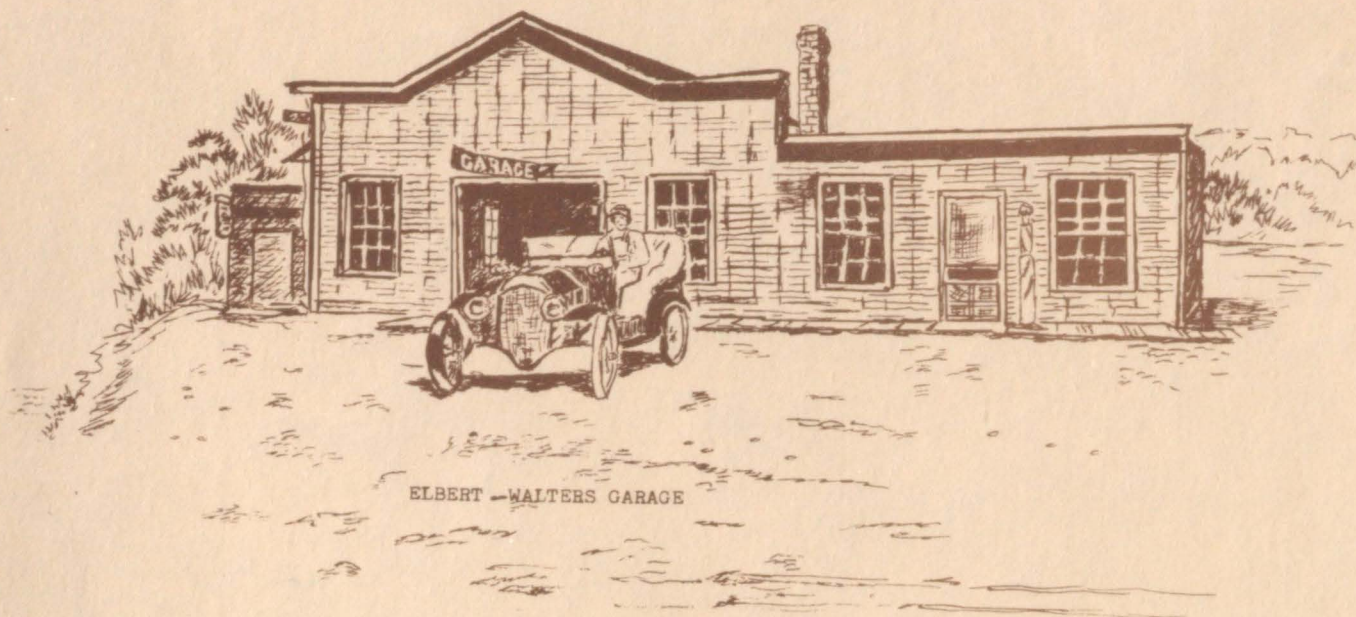


Alfred was the son of George and Elinor Phillips, who were among the earliest settlers of this county. They settled on a farm in St. John, Indiana, where Alfred was born and raised. In early childhood Alfred learned the art of farming, and as he reached manhood, the pursuit of that occupation became his choice. He purchased a farm in Ross Township, where he brought his bride, the former Carrie Wayman. Here their six children were born. The children in the picture are the three older ones, Blanche, Walter, and Elinor. To many people in this area, Elinor is known today as Mrs. Elinor Stowell.



THE PHILLIPS FARMHOUSE





### ELBERT'S GARAGE

The one story frame garage that stood on the northeast corner of Madison and 73rd Avenue was built by George Elbert somewhere around the turn of the century, perhaps about 1890. George, who used it for a short time, leased it to many would be business men. In 1920 the lower side addition that can be seen in the illustration was constructed to house the town library. Prior to that time, the librarian Mrs. Lillie Pierce, had operated the lending service from her living room. Later Mr. Nicholson took over the side addition and opened up a barber shop.

The garage section also changed hands. It was run for a while by Herbert Saxton and Charlie Boyd and still later by the Walters Brothers, Howard, Leslie, and Carl, who in 1917 opened up a new Buick Garage and Repair Shop. Eventually the brothers relocated across the road to the Keilman Building. At some later date (about 1930), the old frame structure was reduced to rubble by fire.

### IDDINGS HOME

At the west end of the historic Sauk Trail in Merrillville, Indiana, there stands what is known as the old Iddings home. The house was built by one of the most prominent pioneers of Ross Township, Dr. Homer Iddings, who left his mark, not only on the town of Merrillville, but on the whole of Lake County.

In memory of Dr. Homer Iddings





Dr. Homer and Mary (Clark) Iddings  
in their home in Merrillville



Dr. Iddings' five sons  
Left: John, Harold, Harry, Morris, and Fred  
All born in the Merrillville home.





Dr. Iddings Home

Dr. Iddings, a graduate of the Detroit College of Medicine, emigrated to Ross Township in 1883. He was known far and wide for his many years of practice, administering to the sick in both the north and central portions of Lake County.

It is mere conjecture as to the time the house was built, but the authors believe it was erected about 1885. The two-story residence of white siding, with double gabled roof, a broad porch spanning one side of the house, and elaborate porch trim and doorways was set back on a wide lawn surrounded by a few large oaks and elm trees.

Today the house, which is still on its original site, is owned and occupied by the William Hutchens family, who purchased the house in 1970. From 1971 to 1976, Mr. Hutchins has been remodeling the house both inside and out. It is gratifying to see a lovely home such as this one not only being renovated and saved for historical reasons, but also once again an attractive addition to the town.

#### WALTZ HOME

This house has had an interesting history, to say the least. Originally the structure was a log cabin built by an unknown owner in the location of the present day Kolby Garage. In the late 1800's, the building was occupied by Sponier (at that time it was considered to be one of the finest houses in town) who plied his trade, coffin making, in his home. In those days, the form fitting casket was fashionable and their manufacture

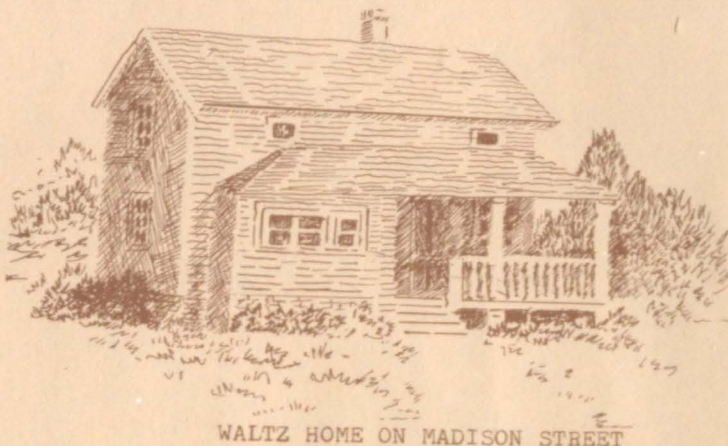


was quite an art. Many of Merrillville's old timers can recall that as children they would run rather than walk past the house in superstitious fear of coffins. Mr. Sponier also lent his carpentry skills to wagon making in a shop next door...an occupation which gave the town's children no cause for alarm.

In 1916 possession of the cabin fell to William and Etta Bowman and they had it moved to its present site at 7230 Madison. Etta and William remodeled the house and added the front porch but left the log personality intact. The next owner, James Caugherty, made additional changes. In 1930 George Waltz, son of a pioneer family who settled in Ross Township in 1893, and new wife Nancy purchased the madeover cabin and have lived there ever since. George added the front bay window to house Nancy's unusual collection of flowers. The main structure of the building still has logs in some places.

#### FLOYD PIERCE HOME

In the center of Merrillville's old business section stands a two-story white frame building called the First Lady Beauty Salon, owned and operated by Brenda Karas. The building was not always a commercial unit, but originally was the home of Floyd Pierce, who was a member of one of the first pioneer families in the community. The building was in the Pierce family from 1895 to 1972, when Mrs. Edith Hire, a daughter of Floyd Pierce, sold it to the present owners.



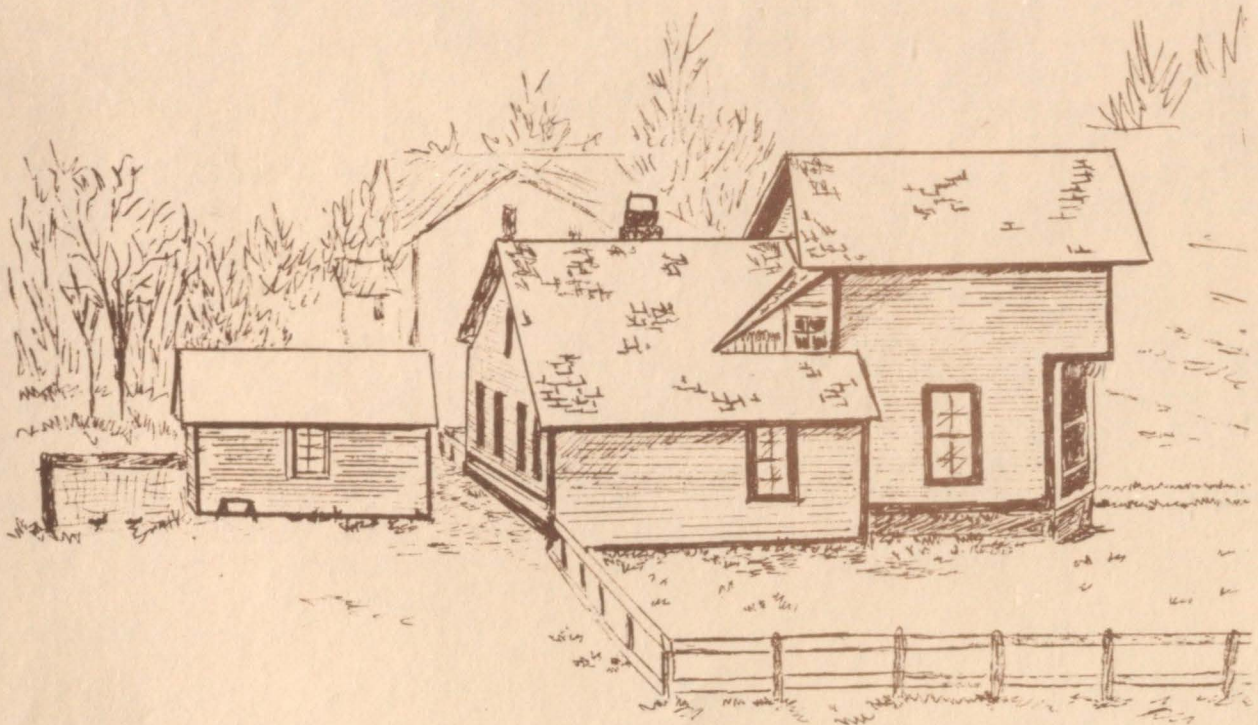
Floyd Pierce was a township trustee who was also known for his influential role in the matters of education in Ross Township, particularly in working for better schools and improved classroom accommodations.

Like the Waltz home, the Pierce home had an unusual history. Mr. Pierce moved an old log building, believed to have been the old harness shop built about 1850, as well as the second known Merrillville post office, from across the street to his property. Working around these two old buildings, he added a large two-story gabled building which

In memory of Mrs. Lillian Pierce



contained a living room, dining room, and upstairs bedroom. The rather ornate design that is still evident today was a feature that many families added to their houses. Today all that remains of the original house is the front portion that contained the living room. The rest of the house was torn off and a new addition made by the present owner.



FLOYD PIERCE HOME  
Now the First Lady Beauty Salon

#### THE COFFEE HOUSE

The Coffee House, located on 73rd Avenue in the middle of Merrillville's old business section, next to the First Lady Beauty Salon, was built around 1885 by James Coffee, and bears little resemblance to the original structure.

The present two-story frame house, having a lateral facade, with a small porch, Classic in style, was originally much larger, having four gables and a one story connecting room in



the rear (which has been removed in recent years.) The double railing on the front porch, has been preserved intact as the owner evidently wished to maintain this distinctly attractive feature.

The Coffees, though the parents of six children, left no descendants bearing their name in the area as most of their offspring relocated. Daughter Alice married Myiel Pierce and some of her grandchildren still reside in this vicinity.



THE COFFEE HOUSE

James and wife Martha, who originally lived east on a farm located near the corner of 73rd and Colorado Street, took advantage of their intown location to participate in local activities. Both husband and wife were devout Methodists and were well known for their work in the church. Moreover Martha lent her time to the Ladies Aid Society, for which she served as president for fifteen years.

#### FOREMAN FARM

The Foreman farm, located on a winding, tree-shaded country road, one mile east of Ainsworth, calls to mind a John Constable landscape, so peaceful is its setting.

Joseph Foreman, a German immigrant, built the eight room, two-story white frame house that stands at the heart of this farm that has been in the family since 1875. The well cared for dwelling with its recessed porch features no embellishments and has been only slightly remodeled inside and out over the years.

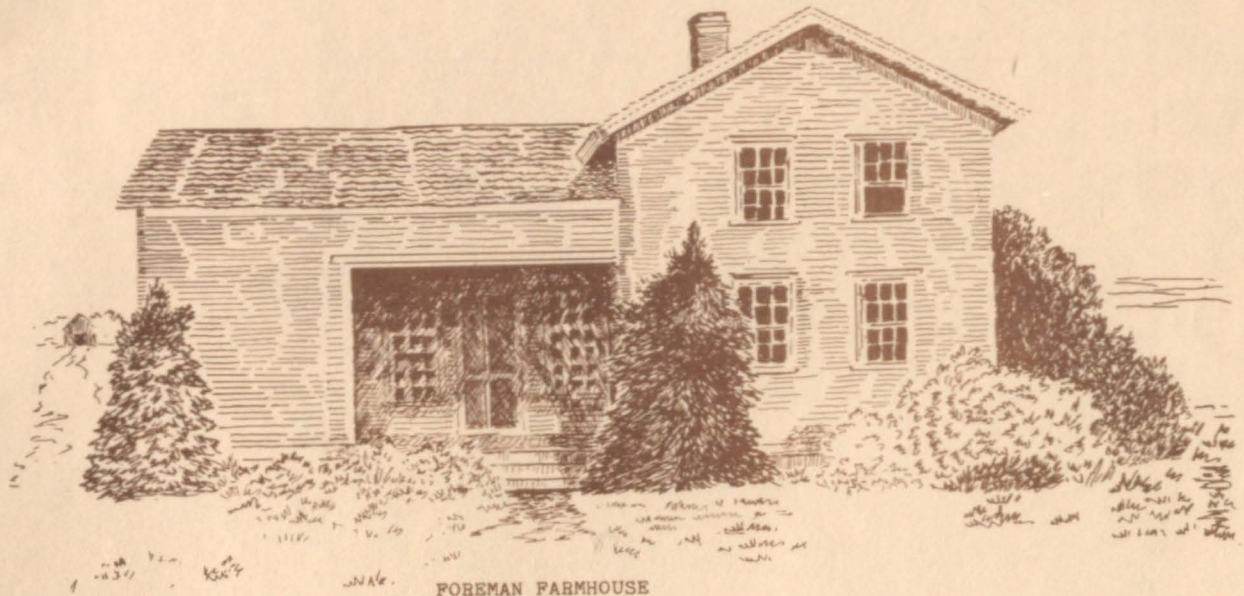
Across the road a large weather worn barn bears witness to the passage of time. A windmill stands next to the old spring house...both indispensable items to farmers of days gone by. The windmill captured the energy available from moving air and used it to pump water to fill the troughs for the cattle. Should there be a period of doldrums, without even a whisper of a breeze, the farmers had the arduous task of pumping the water by hand. The springhouse was usually the first outbuilding erected, so useful was it. In the winter it



protected the preceding fall's harvest from freezing and in the summer it served as an icebox.

It is of historical interest to note that the two-room Ainsworth School (described elsewhere in this publication) stood on land donated by Mr. Foreman to the community. The land was returned to the Foreman family when the school had outlived its usefulness.

Joseph Foreman had two sons to help him run his farm, and today, Otto Foreman, Joseph's grandson, is the third generation to occupy the house, which is largely in its original condition. Noteworthy among the changes is the addition of wrought iron work by the front door.



### THE TONY SMITH DAIRY FARM

This once successful and well known dairy farm is located at 5580 Harrison across from the St. Peter and Paul Church. The farm and associated structures have undergone considerable changes in the one hundred plus years since George Hoffman first purchased the 160 acre plot of land and associated log cabin that started it all. George, a native of Bavaria, Germany, who made his way to this country in 1845, built a new house in 1880 that with modifications and additions still



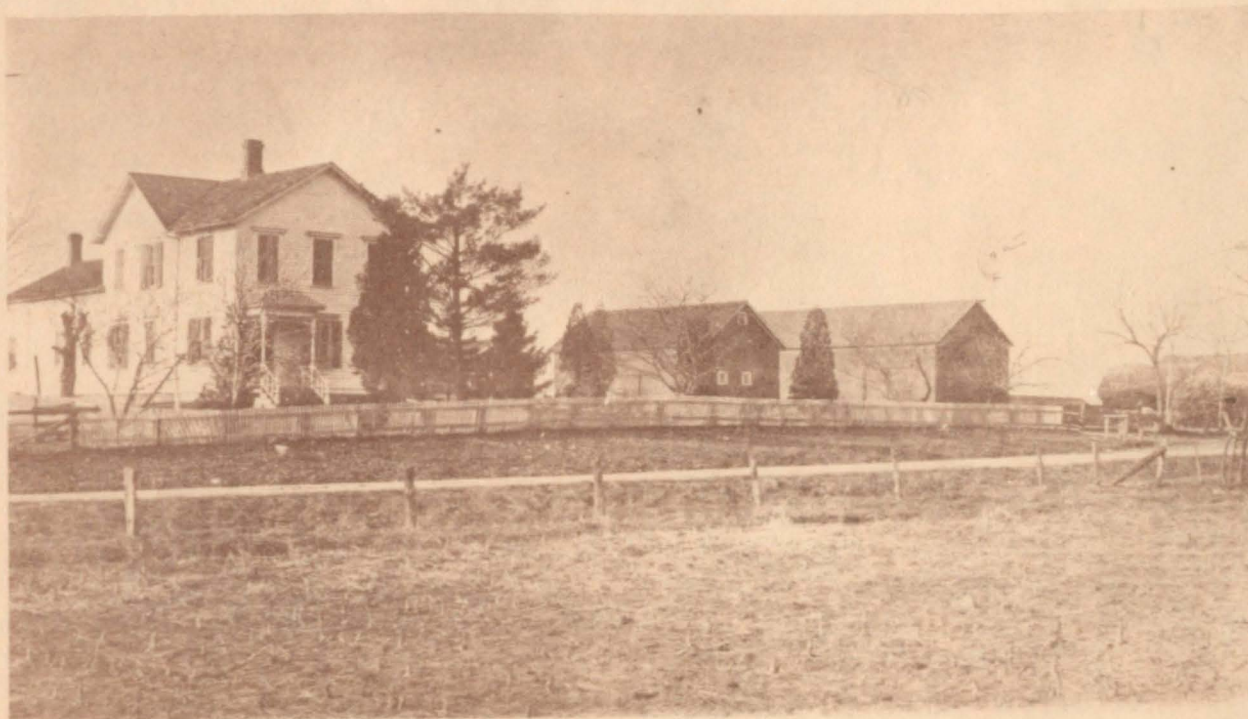
stands today. After George's death, ownership passed to George's son, John George, who moved another farmhouse to the land and added it onto George's home. The resulting amalgamation provided comfortable living quarters for John's family of seven children.

The house was heated by wood burning stoves in the kitchen and dining room. The bedrooms were unheated so the occupants relied upon piles of heavy quilts and woolen blankets to protect them from the chill of Indiana winter nights. Getting up early to light the fires in the stoves and to prepare a breakfast of eggs, potatoes, hot rolls and honey was a task that fell to the Hoffman daughters.

John's daughter, Margaret, married Anthony Smith and the couple took over operation of the farm in 1928. Tony bought up more land and added new buildings, including a small milk house where the family sold milk for the extremely reasonable price of three gallons for fifty cents! Later a larger dairy store was erected to handle their large and lucrative business. This building now houses the Merrillville License Bureau.

The dairy farm, besides being a popular shopping spot, was also a favorite with the school children, whose tours of the premises included a survey of the livestock, an overview of the operations and a special treat, a hayride.

Mrs. Tony Smith, who has spent almost 70 years in the house, recalls the contentment and happiness she shared with her siblings in childhood and her husband in marriage while living in her ancestral home.

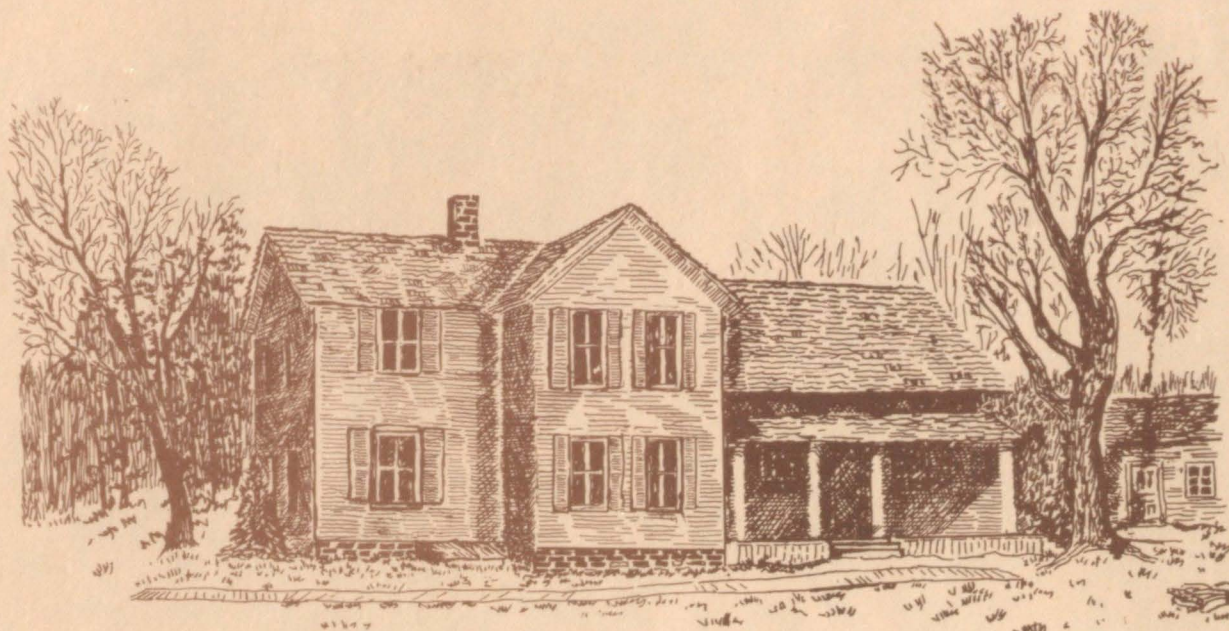






The Tony Smith Family  
Left: Raymond, Mrs. Margaret Smith, Joehana, George, Anabel,  
Anthony, Gerald, Clarence, and Mr. Toney Smith  
1930





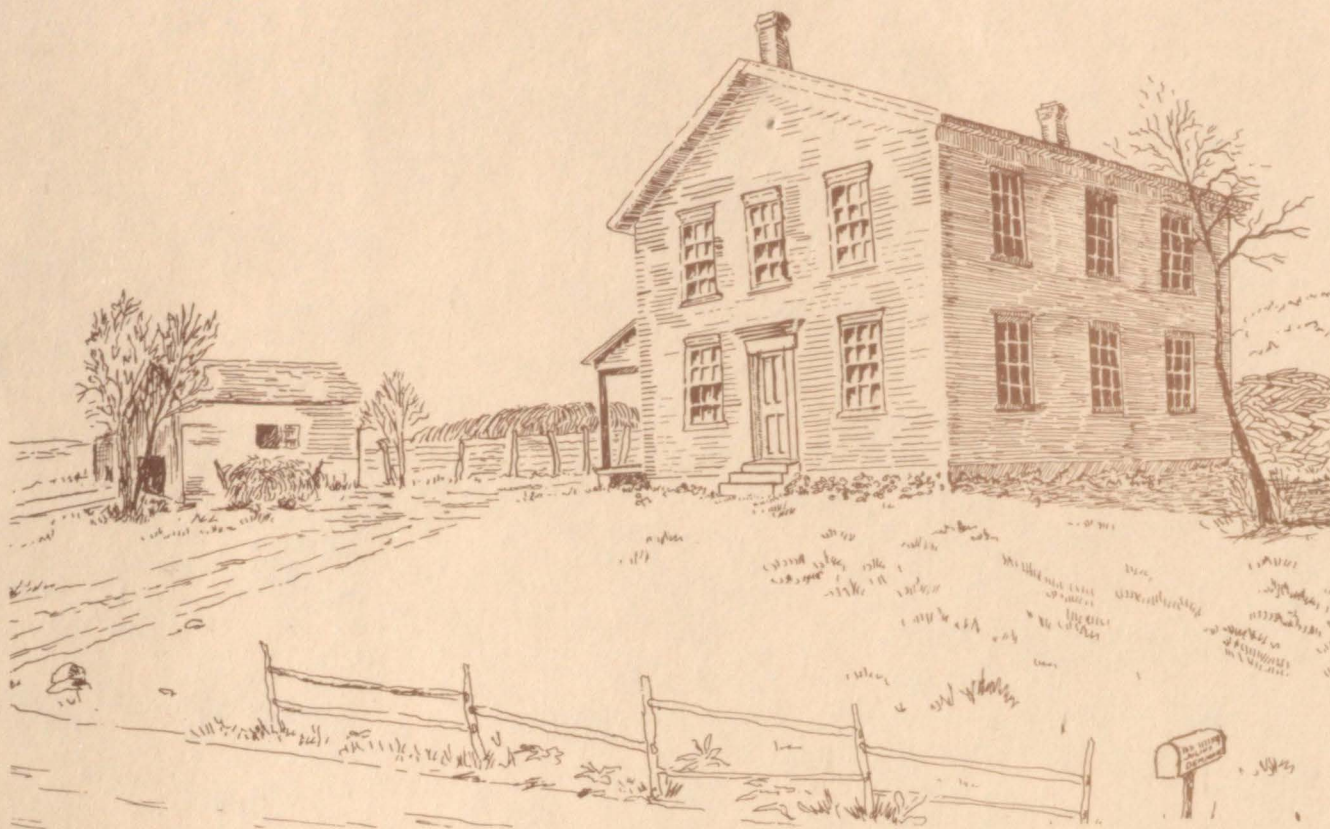
TONY SMITH FARM

TONY SMITH  
FARM



George and Barbara Hoffman  
Parents of Margaret Hoffman





### JULIUS DEMMON HOMESTEAD

The Demmon House, which no longer stands, was built about 1855 on a slope overlooking the old Sauk Trail a mile west of the town of Merrillville, Indiana. The modest two-story building was a typical midwestern farmhouse, characteristically simple in plan but structurally sound and functional as indeed it would have needed to be, to withstand the punishment that twelve children, six sons and six daughters, could dish out. A single concession to adornment could be seen in the side porch, which besides being decorative, offered shelter from the hot summer sun.

This house, which in later years became weather stained and dilapidated, was once a well kept shelter for a family, which though not politically prominent was representative of the earnest, hardworking type of people who made valuable contributions to the community. This house represented a circle's center from which the twelve offspring radiated outward, each building his own home on his share of the two thousand acres Julius left. Many of these homes are illustrated in this book.

Today Julius and his children are gone, but they have left many descendants in this area too numerous to list here.





The Demmon Family  
Nancy and Juilus Demmon  
Clarissa, Anne, Mary, Eliza, Martha, and Alice  
Clinton, Charles, John, Daniel, George, and William



## STOLTZ GENERAL STORE

Shopping for groceries in a modern supermarket is a necessary but unwelcome chore that involves pushing a cart through long aisles of shelved foods, making your selections, standing in line to be checked out and leaving with your purchases....seldom seeing an acquaintance. The experience seems so cold and sterile and devoid of all but the smallest aspects of human interaction. This was not the case back in the early 1900's. In those days stores were small and friendly and they were centers for the exchange of news and ideas. One establishment that was the embodiment of the traits of the small American retail business was the Stoltz General Store.

John and Margaret (Gerlach) Stoltz in partnership with Carl Gerlach built the store in 1905. The high square building located at 500 73rd Avenue was constructed to be a combined home and store. Business was good but the operation was not profitable enough to support two families, so John and Margaret bought her brother out and continued the business on their own until John's death in 1945. Margaret then ran the store with the help of her daughter and son-in-law, Mabel and Joe Derrenbacker, until 1950 at which time they, moving to Florida, sold it to Roy Bohne of Gary.

Everyone enjoyed the warm atmosphere that permeated the Stoltz store. For many town folk it served various needs. Not only was it a place to buy necessities like axe handles, dried apples, lanterns, sugar, and dry goods, but it was also a place to pass the time of day, get advice for a problem, pick up some juicy gossip, obtain solace and commiseration for misfortunes, and to exchange farming tips and recipes. Many's the group of farmers who sat around the potbellied stove discussing the month's happenings and trading fish stories. There was yet another social benefit to visiting the store, that of meeting young, unattached people. Several of Merrillville's oldtimers met their future mates in the cozy surroundings of the store. "There wasn't too much else to do in those days, so we made excuses to go to the store where we could meet other young folks," explains Nancy Waltz. "That's where I met George. He asked me if he got a new car would I go for a ride with him. Shucks, he didn't have to buy a new car to take me out. I'd a gone anyhow."

John Stoltz loved to while away the hours conversing with the farmers. In fact, his tendency to sit and chat would rancor Margaret, who put out by his windy ways, would try to catch his eye and motion for him to quit gabbing. After a while, to avoid her disapproving stares, John developed the useful habit of looking at the ceiling when he talked.

The Stoltz store advertised fresh meat...a claim that was a bit of an understatement, for upon a request for chicken

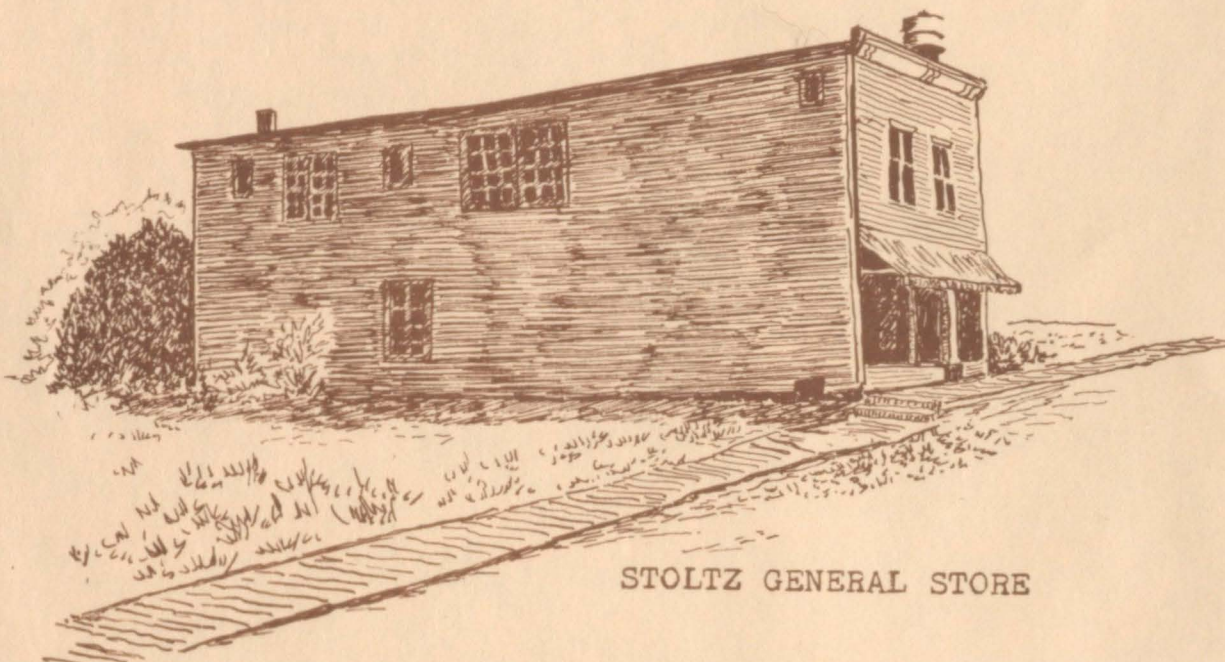


Margaret would go out back, kill a bird, and come in carrying it with the blood still flowing from the headless fowl. On one occasion a customer good naturedly inquired, "Are you sure it's fresh?" The fresh meat advertisement also included beef which Margaret butchered herself in the rear of the shop.

The well known and well liked Stoltz family was honest and generous to a fault...to the point where they had to budget their own finances carefully to make up for their help to others. During the Depression many families in this area would have gone hungry were it not for the Stoltzs' magnanimous ways. With no work or money in those difficult times, many people charged the food they got at the store. In time some were able to pay their bill, but others never could. The Stoltzes never pressed them for the money.

Gone now are the Stoltzes and their general store. Their tender hearted policies might be regarded by some of today's entrepreneurs as naive and no way to make a profit yet it has earned them the fond and respectful remembrance of their townsmen.

The building still stands though drastically remodeled. The facade has been altered; there's been an addition to the back, and more modern windows replace the old ones that were on the lower part of the building. The former Stoltz store, operated by Mr. Vale, is currently used as an office building for dentists and real estate agents.



STOLTZ GENERAL STORE





Inside the Stoltz Store



Margaret, John, and Mabel Stoltz



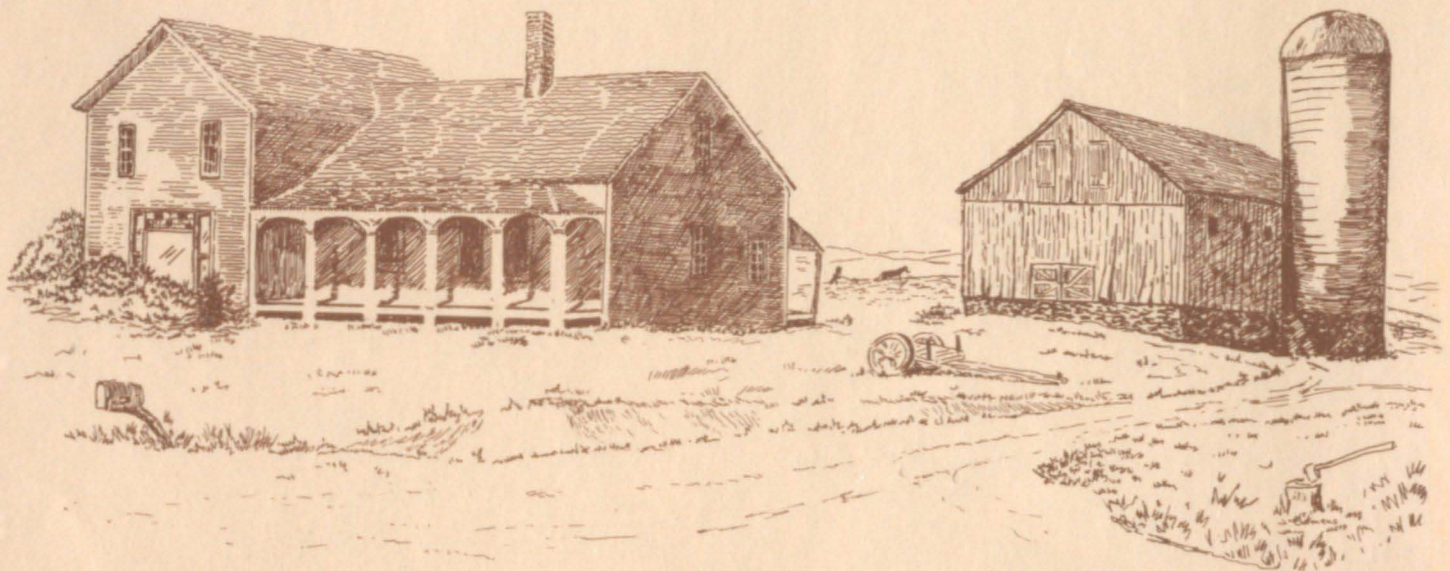
## BURGE-IFYU FARM

The Ifyu home, a two-story frame structure, one mile west of Merrillville, Indiana, on 73rd Avenue, is another of the many homes of Julius Demmon's descendants. Newton and Martha (Demmon) Burge resided in this house that was built on land that patriarch Julius purchased from John Merrill about 1865. (It is not known whether the Merrills or the Burges are responsible for the construction.) Newton and Martha lived in the house for a few years after their marriage, then moved to Wheeler, Indiana (1883) in which city their six children were born. The Burges returned to the Township in the early 1900's and the children married into old pioneer families of the area and went their separate ways to other townships with their respective spouses.

The year 1938 saw the return of a Demmon descendant to the old farm on 73rd Avenue. Leota, granddaughter of Martha, and her husband, Lasslo Ifyu, bought the farm and there their children were born.

In 1951, an unfortunate accident on the farm, took the life of Leota, leaving Lasslo and their small children to mourn her loss. Lasslo took a second wife, Ellen Wood, of Demotte, Indiana, who successfully fulfilled the need for a good wife and mother.

The Ifyu family has been living in the house for nearly forty years, but sadly their occupancy is about to end. Even now Merrillville residents can observe the piece by piece demolition of the barn and sheds. Soon the old house will similarly be dismantled and in its stead will rise a modern bank building, surrounded by asphalt parking lot where once there were corn fields.

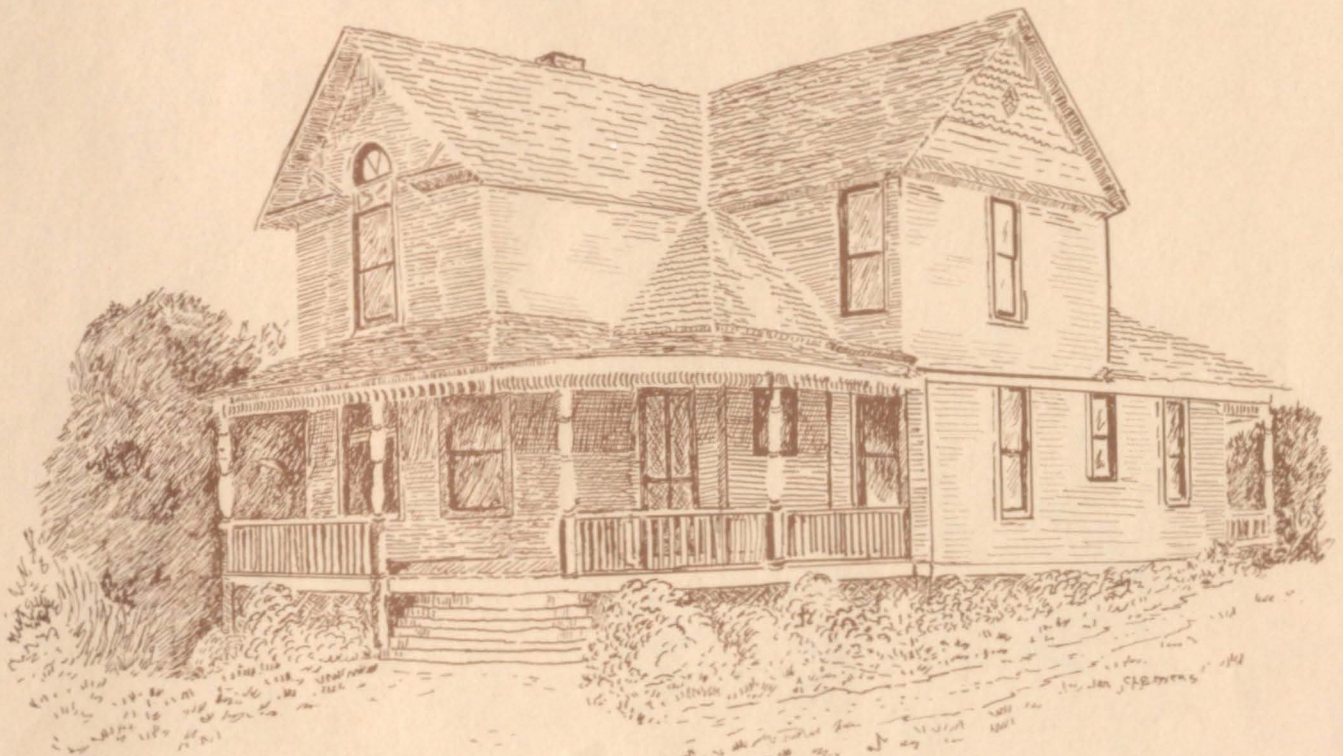




## DAVID AND ALICE (DEMMON) OWEN HOME

The Owen home was an impressive ten room, two story house built about 1889 on Cleveland Avenue, near the present Block House in what was called Lottaville, Indiana. The four gabled house had five rooms on a floor with a massive staircase and grand entry. Windmills pumped water into the bathtub upstairs. Multiple entrances (four or five) gave access from various sides of the house. A wide porch spanned the front and side of the house and a smaller porch adorned the back. There was a cellar under the house for storage and storm protection. Beautiful polished floors and exquisite woodworking were to be found throughout. Mrs. Lucille Franz described it as "one of the best houses in the county."

Alice, daughter of Julius Demmon, and her husband David Owen, who was an energetic, thrifty farmer as his well-tilled fields demonstrated to all that could see, moved to California in later years. After they moved, the house and land sold to Michael Wehner, who in turn sold the property to Ed Krieter. When Ed moved out, the house stood vacant for several years and unfortunately fell prey to vandals, who wreaked so much havoc that the fire department was forced to burn the building down in 1973.



DAVID AND ALICE (DEMMON) OWEN FARMHOUSE

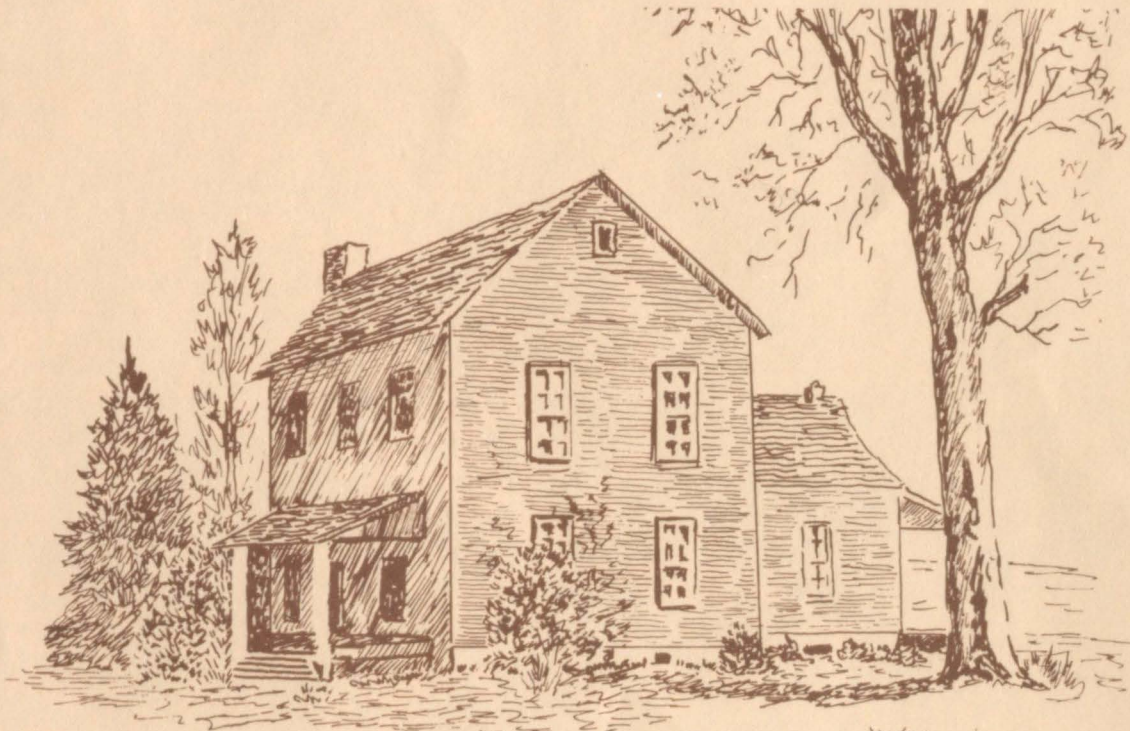


## HOOLEY-DEMMON HOUSE

The Hooley-Demmon House in Ross Township, built by Thomas Hooley about 1877, is acknowledged to be one of the oldest wood-frame dwellings in the area. The clapboards are weathered dark grey, and the roof sags a bit under the weight of its years. About fifteen yards to the right of the house stands another larger frame house in a similar state of preservation. These two separate dwellings at one time were the single home of Thomas and Ann Hooley. Ann, the daughter of Julius Demmon, had inherited 160 acres from her father, and Thomas built the large seventeen room house to accommodate his family of six children and hired help.

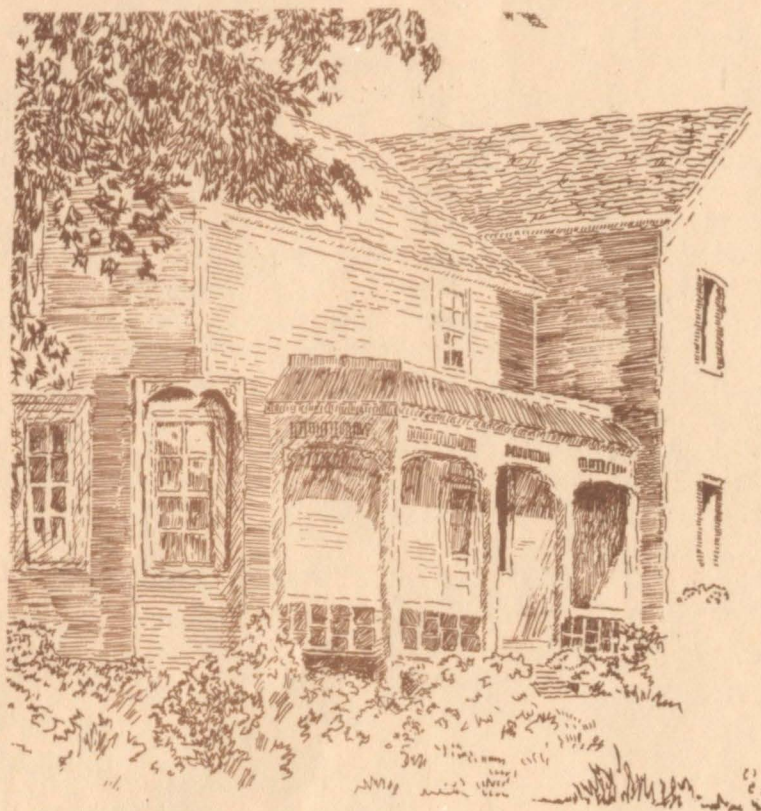
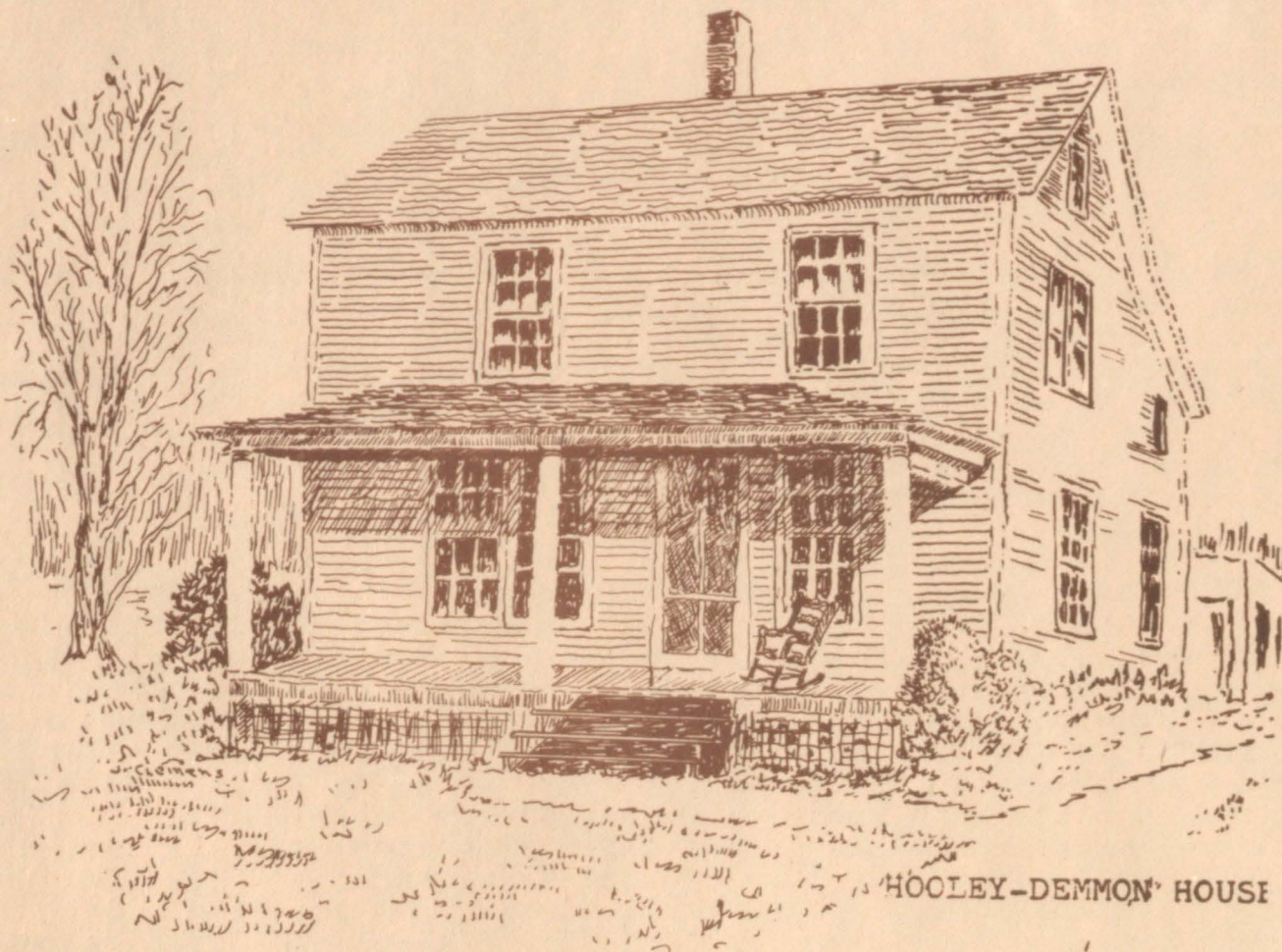
The spacious two-story house, located three miles west of Merrillville, was once the heart of a very active and successful dairy farm. The energetic and ambitious Thomas constantly improved the grounds and buildings, adding when necessary. In 1905, he built one of the "finest" barns in the area. The 72 foot long by 52 feet wide structure was compartmentalized to provide for a large grain bin and livestock stalls...eight for horses and thirty for cows.

Today the houses stand separate and forlorn like two ghosts of the past. They shelter rentees now and even though children can be seen playing in the yard of the larger house and cars whiz past on the highway, the atmosphere is such that an onlooker visualizes the buildings as the single Hooley home with the Hooley children going about their day's chores on the grounds.



Hooley - Demmon Home





LENNERTZ HOUSE



## LENNERTZ HOMESTEAD

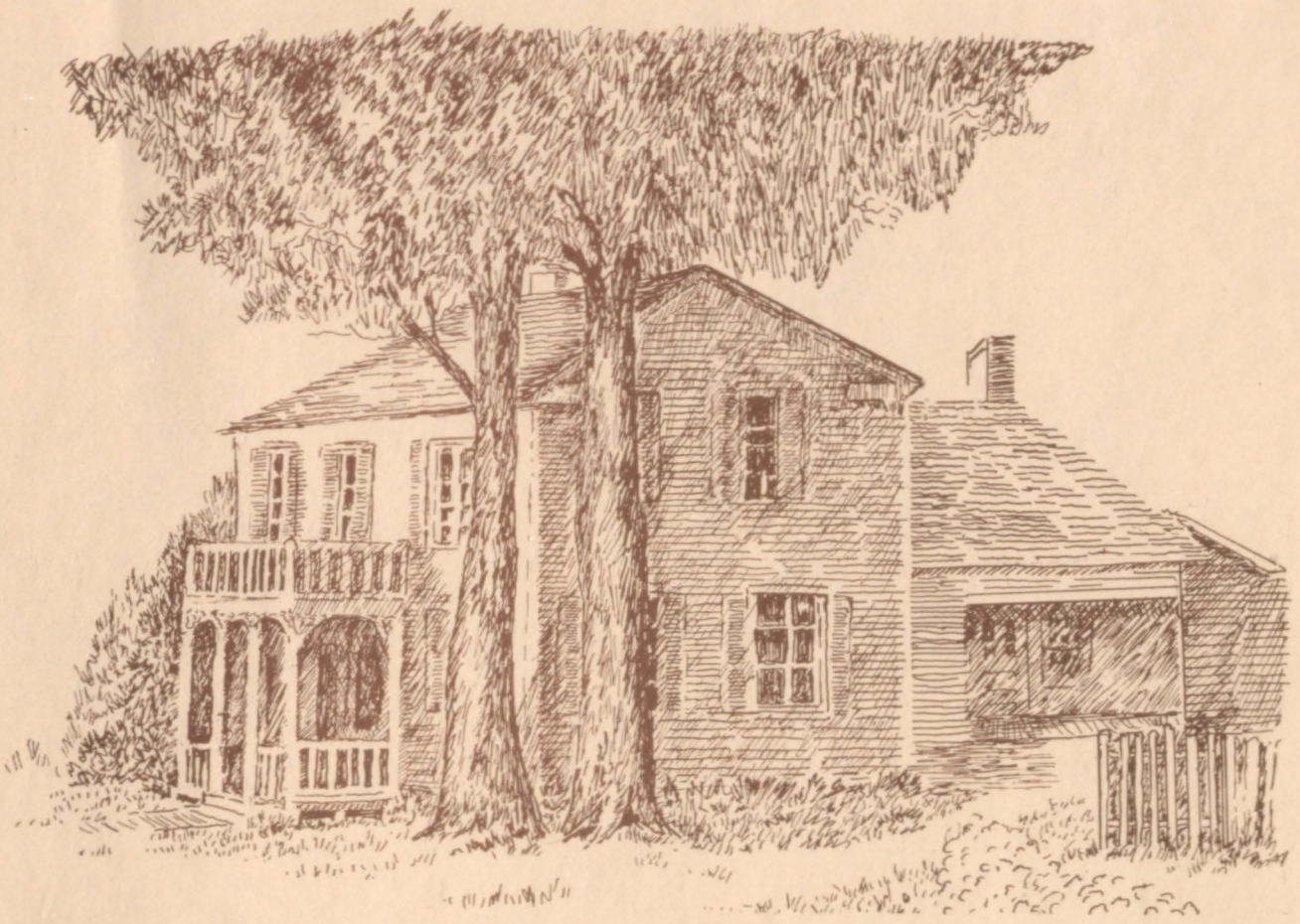
On the southeast side of Madison Street, just off the intersection of 73rd and Madison, stands a large two-story frame house known as the Old Lennertz Place. This is the house where the history of the Lennertz family begins. Mathias Lennertz and his family were and have been identified with Ross Township since pioneer times, and their enterprise and hard work have been important factors in the growth of the community both then and now.

Mathias Lennertz, who is still remembered for his honest, good natured ways by oldtime Merrillville residents, had the distinction of being the longest established blacksmith in Ross Township. For nearly forty years he was the town smithy, and later his son Peter operated both the shop and a feed mill. The third generation of the Lennertz family to run the business is Charles Lennertz, who later moved to a new location where he presently operates Lennertz Fireplace and Patio Shop. Mathias' son Fred was a car dealer in this area for forty-four years. He was co-founder of Walter and Lennertz Buick Garage at County Road 330 and Harrison in 1923. Soon after it was formed the firm moved to a new location north on Broadway. James Lennertz and Kenneth Walters took over the operation of the business in 1950. Kenneth Walters sold out in later years and today the firm is known as Lennertz Oldsmobile.

The house, built a hundred years ago, has been fortunate in its owners because it has been well preserved and cared for. Few alterations have been made outside the house other than that an addition was made in the back of the house to be used as a summer kitchen. The building's exterior is marked by two steep-gables and a side porch with intricate bric-a-brac trim. Inside are nine large, high-ceilinged rooms, which today have been changed into apartments, one up and one down. Son Fred and his wife lived in the upstairs apartment when they were first married. When Mathias had the house built, comfort was foremost in his plans. Most of the rooms downstairs had doors that could be shut off from the others to keep a room warm. This practice was typical of homes before central heating was established. In 1925, Mathias had a cottage built in the back of the house to accommodate a daughter and her new husband.

Mathias died in 1939, and his wife, Barbara, (daughter of George Hoffman) in 1942. The house passed to the children who sold it in later years.





#### DUDDLY MERRILL HOME

It would be unthinkable to write any history of Merrillville, Indiana, without mentioning the Merrill brothers of old Centerville, Indiana for whom the town was named. Duddly and William Merrill were successful businessmen of marked ability and energy who helped shape the development of this community. Their enterprise contributed to a foundation for growth that still sustains the town more than one hundred years later. What follows is a brief sketch of Duddly's activities that due to space limitations cannot do him justice.

When Duddly arrived in this area, Merrillville was little more than an encampment on an old Indian trail, and at first Duddly chose to settle at Deep River but later relocated to Wiggins Point. The Old Sauk Trail was earmarked for a stagecoach route from Fort Dearborn (Chicago) to Joliet and passed right through Wiggins Point. Recognizing the value of



holding property along the trail, Duddly purchased some of the land, subdivided it, sold it at a profit and reinvested in more land. On some of the land he built a cheese factory in what later was to be known as Merrill Hall. He also erected a general merchandising store around 1850 located next to the Old California Hotel. The store was a long, narrow two-story frame edifice with the usual square store front. Double doors opened out to a two foot high boardwalk. (Such high boardwalks were a practical necessity since the roads were very muddy and the nearby creek had the uncooperative habit of overflowing its banks and washing up clear to the front of the store.) A man by the name of Sam Straight was his partner for awhile until Duddly sold his portion of the business to Mrs. Hale. Later Duddly bought the store back and his sons Oliver and John clerked for him. When John married, he acquired ownership. John ran the business for many years. The store burned sometime in the 1890's.

Duddly Merrill was responsible for the construction of several other structures, among them his two-story clapboard frame dwelling located at 12 W. 73rd Avenue. Grecian in style, the house has wide entablatures, tall, narrow windows, a small porch and well defined pediments at the gable ends of the building. The house has undergone many changes since Duddly first built it in 1847. The original clapboards were removed and the walls covered with asbestos siding and like most old homes, the front porch has been closed in. About 1951, a two-story addition was made in the rear of the house.

It is not known when or if Duddly moved from the house. He may have resided there till his death. His son Charles Merrill lived in it for a time. The house changed hands several times until about 1900 when Walter Demmon purchased the home. He rented the house to George and Nellie (Guernsey) Demmon and it was there that their six children, Ella, Earl, Irene, Martha, Clarence, and Arthur grew up. (All but Irene still reside in Merrillville.)

The house has been in the Demmon family three generations the present owners being Thomas and Jean Yaros. Mrs. Yaros is the granddaughter of Walter Demmon.



## HURLBURT HOMESTEAD

Traveling along ~~Colorado~~ <sup>Randolph</sup> Road about a mile and a half south of Highway 30, this author came upon an attractive well cared for brick farmhouse. The immediate impression was one of tranquillity and dignity. In basic form the house is not very different from other Ross Township farm homes yet on closer examination one sees that it has a distinctive Italianate design that sets it apart from the others. The familiar forms which are characteristic of that style, (posts, brackets under the eaves, wide entablatures, and tall windows) are combined in an individual manner which exhibits class. The one-storied entrance porch with its slender square posts, gives an air of simple dignity. The projection on the main section in the form of a bay window, the curved windows, and the brackets under the broad eaves add to the informal and yet stately atmosphere of the setting. Finally, the way the house is set in the landscape, on a slope shaded by aged trees with a background of open green fields, suggests a sense of timelessness that evokes a feeling of nostalgia for days that seem less complicated.

The architect and builder of this gracious dwelling was Milan Hurlburt, who erected it about 1865. The story connected with this house goes back to an earlier time and to another man, Jacob Hurlburt, who was Milan's father.

A personality profile of Jacob reads like a sketch of a character from a frontier novel. Big and brawney, and adept at living by his wits, Jacob came to Lake County in 1834 and spent his time trapping, hunting and learning the geography of the region. This experience won him the job of guiding and working with U.S. Surveyors in the Crown Point, Indiana, area. He also acted as guide for many early pioneers, among them Solon Robinson and his group.

Jacob and Susan, his young bride of sixteen, settled in Ross Township on a claim near what was later to be called Hurlburt Corners. (Incidentally it was on a piece of their land that the one room Hurlburt School was erected. This school numbered George Boyd among its teachers and Melvin, Clarence, Ray, and Hazzard Guernsey, Harry, Delbert, and Vern Young, Pearl Wert, and Ethel and Chester Hurlburt among its students). For many years Hurlburts lived in a log cabin until a more comfortable home was built. (Picture of this home not available).

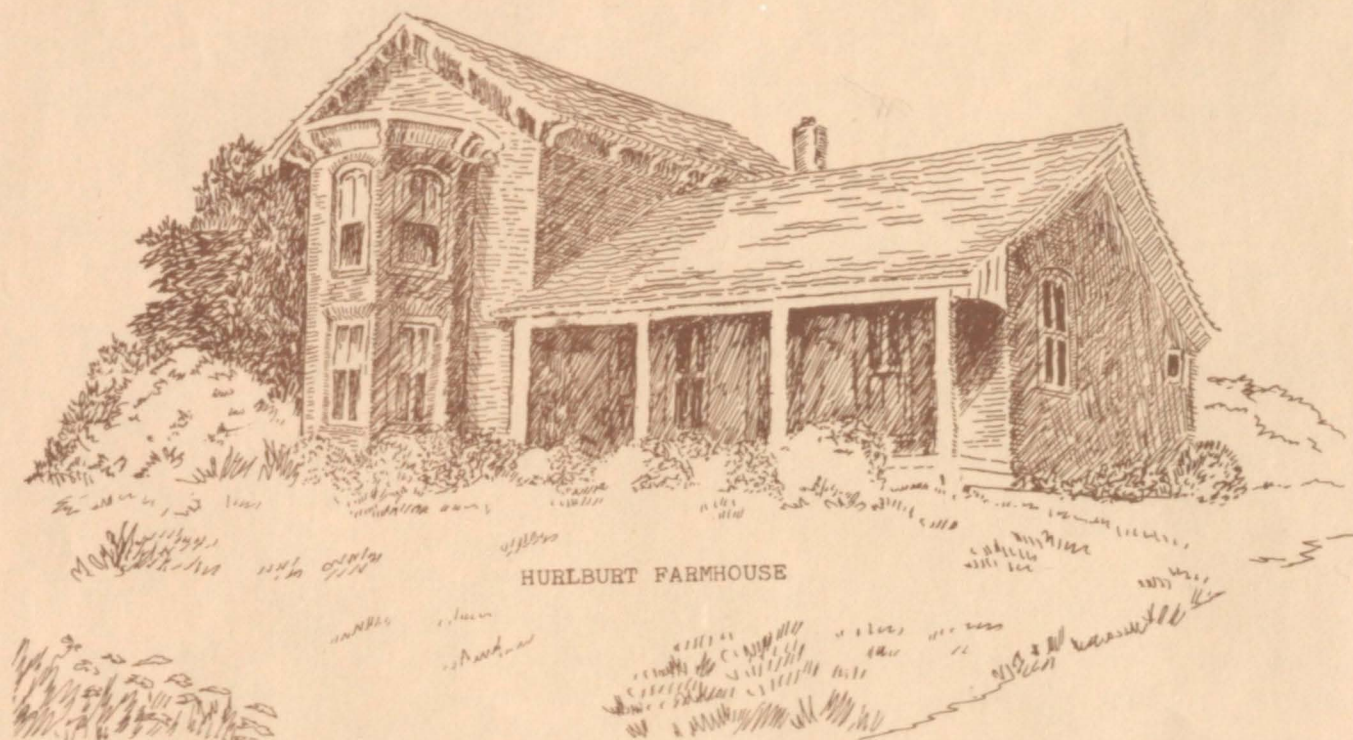
Jacob, besides acting in his trail blazing capacity, found time to devote to farming and to civic affairs. In both enterprises he was extremely competent and all his undertakings



met with great success. One anecdote in particular serves to illustrate the awe and respect with which his contemporaries regarded him.

Jacob was in the habit of taking his grain to Woods Mill in Deep River to be ground into flour and he could often be found there discussing the problems of the town with other farmers and business men. On one such occasion, the discussion was interrupted by a small band of Indians knocking on the door seeking a handout. The Indians, having been denied their request and encouraged to leave, became more adamant in their demands and threatened damage to the mill. Their bravado was quickly transformed into timidity however when they were confronted by the sight of three hundred pound, heavily bearded Jacob looming ominously at the door. Needless to say, they retreated without further incident.

After Jacob retired from farming, he moved in with Milan and his daughter-in-law Sarah, where he lived the rest of his life. Milan and Sarah spent many memorable years in the house with their children and Jacob. Eventually the house was sold outside the family.





## WALTERS HOME

The Walters House on North Madison Street, though not one of the oldest structures in Merrillville, is of considerable interest in that it was the home of Ernest "Cheese Henry" Walters, who through his business enterprises played a substantial role in the development of the community.

The residence is set back from the road under the shade of large oak trees and is very much unlike the other homes surrounding it. It is a two and one-half story stucco structure with a gable projecting toward the street, a feature that imparts an impression of lateral length to the building. The porch is distinctive in that it has hipped roof styling and alternating block trim in the railing design. The exterior of the house, built around 1900, is essentially the same as the day Ernest moved into it, although the front porch is currently undergoing remodeling.

Ernest Walters, a native of Sheboygan, Wisconsin, married Louise Nicksch and was father to three sons. Early in his successful business career, he established cheese factories in Merrillville and in Deep River from which he supplied the area with his delicious wares for many years. Among his occupational pursuits could also be numbered the jobs of town assessor and real estate developer as he partitioned a tract of his land into several lots and street to form Walters Subdivision (which Walters Avenue led into.)

In 1929, after Ernest died and widow Louise moved into an apartment above Walters Buick Garage, son Howard and his wife, Clara (Gerlach) Walters, took possession of the house. For 38 years, the dwelling housed renters and then about 1968, Mrs. Walters sold the house to Mr. and Mrs. C. Sutton.

"Cheese Henry" and his flavorful cheeses are remembered with a fond smile by oldtime residents.







"Cheese" Henry Walters  
and son Walter



Mathias Neudorf —



"The Grand Ole Man"  
Bartlett Woods



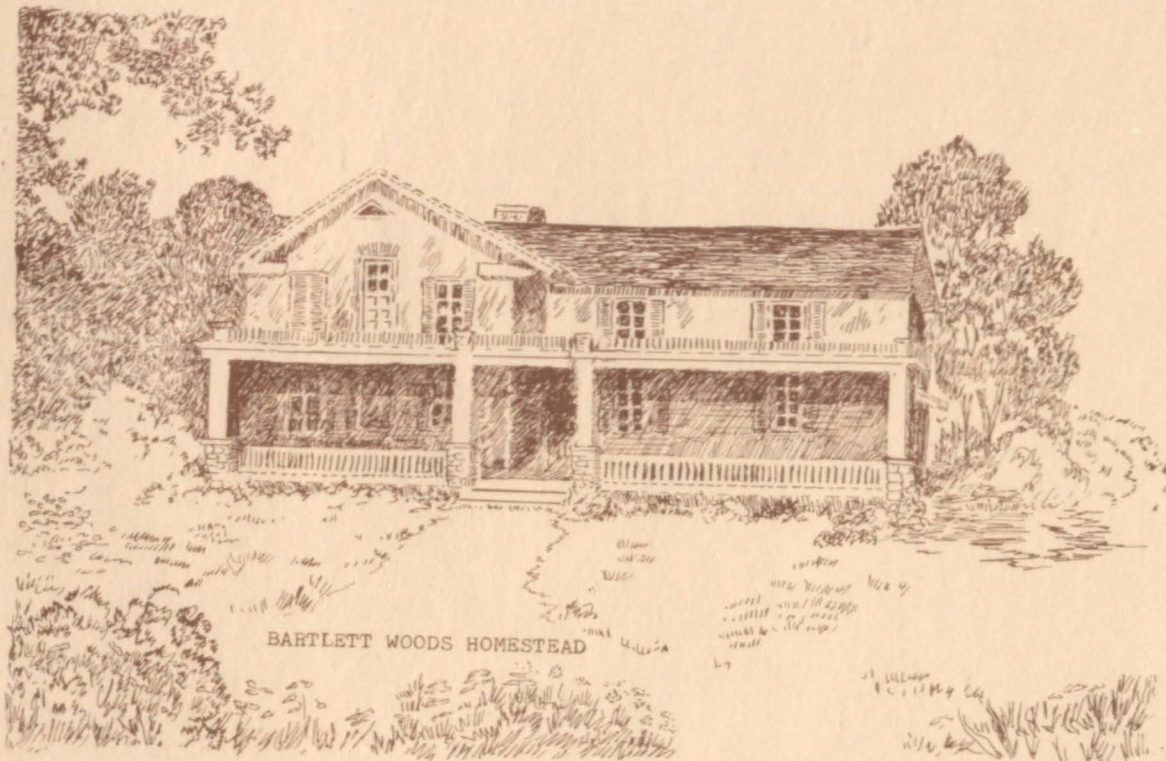
Mrs. Bartlett Woods



## HICKORY RIDGE FARM

There was nothing very remarkable in a physical sense about the old house that stood on the corner of 57th and Cleveland just off Route 53 in Ross Township. It resembled countless other homes found in other small towns. But this was special because it was the home of Bartlett Woods, the "Grand Ole Man of Lake County."

Bartlett, a native of Germany, was one of the earliest





settlers in the area, having arrived here in 1837, the very year the county was formed. A log cabin sheltered the family for a time until the dense woodland could be cleared and preparations for a more suitable home could be made. Around 1850 Bartlett built his two-story frame dwelling, and though it had little in the way of ornamentation, the simple Greek revival style house was designed to be a comfortable and functional farmhouse. The nine room structure had a large fireplace in the spacious living room and featured fine oak floors and woodwork throughout. The original front portico was small but was later replaced by a larger one that spanned the front of the house.

Bartlett Woods, noted public figure, was active in the antislavery movement, was the local founder of the Republican party, served as a state representative, was an accomplished newspaper writer and was considered to be a deep thinker. His estate was known to area residents as Hickory Ridge Farm and was acknowledged to be one of the leading dairy farms in the township. However, farming was secondary to Bartlett. His major pursuits were those activities that made him one of the most prominent public leaders in all of Lake County.

Four generations of the Woods family lived in the house until the last Woods descendant to occupy it offered the home as a museum show place. Sadly this opportunity was lost to the town due to the unavailability of funds to restore the house. The Fire Department was forced to burn it down in 1956 and today all that remains as a reminder of the Grand Ole Man of Lake County is an historical marker to inform the idle passerby that the piece of land on which he is standing once surrounded the home of a very distinguished man.





## MERRILL-PIERCE-NEUDORF-LOYCE HOME

By the spring of 1870, the town of Merrillville had become an active and well-established settlement, emulating the mellowness and settled ways of older towns. On either side of hilly Joliet Road (73rd Avenue), which was lumpy and deep-rutted from the heavy wheels that had groaned and strained through the winter mud, stood large oak trees. Behind them rose established homes and stores. Some new homes were constructed on the few vacant lots scattered here and there. Among those built that year was the John Merrill home, one of the "fanciest" houses in town.

The spacious ten room dwelling, like most houses built in the Township, was L-shaped with a projection toward the street, and had a good sized porch in the angle. Unadorned windows, and plain wall surfaces lend, by contrast, more emphasis to the double porch railings and the ornamental woodwork above the columns. The stylish house was befitting the prominent men who lived in it.

John Merrill, builder of the house, was the son of one of the town fathers, Duddly Merrill. John, after serving as a first lieutenant in the Civil War, returned home and opened a general merchandise store thus building himself a reputation as an able businessman like his father before him. He also was the stage proprietor, a town Trustee and County Treasurer.

In the mid 1880's John Merrill moved to Crown Point, Indiana, and sold his home to Marion Pierce. Like Merrill, Pierce was a prominent businessman. This top ranking merchant found time to serve as trustee, postmaster, and internal revenue officer. Marion married Margaret Randolph, who interestingly enough was a sister of John's wife. Both Merrill-Randolph and Pierce-Randolph weddings took place in the year 1867.

The accompanying photograph is of the Pierce family and the hired girl. Pictured from left to right are Richardson, the hired girl, Cora, Marion's daughter, his wife Margaret, son Ralph, Marion, and son Floyd.

In 1910 Mathias Neudorf, who operated the coal business in Merrillville, purchased the Pierce home. Mathias was a widower who had married Mary Loyce of Chicago and had become stepfather to her two sons, Ray and Ralph. A small office was added to the west side of the house for his business transactions. In those days when coal was the primary fuel, about everyone in town picked up their coal at the shed near the train station and carried it to the scale beside the Neudorf home to be



weighed. Ralph Loyce bought into the business in 1935 and eventually bought Matt out. In 1959 he closed down the operation due to lack of customers. The availability of electricity and natural gas had all but made coal obsolete. The coal business had gone the way of the ice business. Ralph finally sold the house in 1963 after he had lived there fifty two years.



HOME OF FOUR PIONEERS: John Merrill, Marion Pierce,  
Mathias Neudorf, and Ralph Loyce.

In Memory of Mrs. Lillian Pierce



## SAXTON-KOCH HOUSE

One of the most unpretentious old dwellings in Merrillville is the small story and a half cottage located on Madison Street on the northeast side of the C & O Railroad tracks. To most people it is merely a building and probably the least appreciated of the old pioneer homes. Yet it gave shelter to several early settlers in this area.

The L-shaped house with a small porch in the angle, a common building form throughout this area, is situated on land that was once a part of an eighty acre farm belonging first to Myiel Pierce, then to Duddly Merrill. The land was divided each time it was sold until finally in 1863, Alvin and Lucinda Green purchased six and a half acres of the original eighty acres and built the present home which they occupied until 1874. At this time they sold the dwelling to Ebenezer and Minerva Saxton.

Ebenezer Saxton migrated from Canada to Ross Township with his wife and six children in a covered wagon, bouncing through the woodlands and rolling over the prairies, fighting muddy roads. They had brought with them treasured pieces of furniture and necessary farming implements, many of which had to be discarded on the wayside to prevent the wagon from bogging down in the mire. Arriving at Wiggins Point, (now Merrillville), in 1837, they took up residence in the log cabin belonging to Jeremiah Wiggois. There they lived for many years and there two other children were born to them. Ebenezer farmed the land for 37 years, finally retiring in 1874. At that time he purchased the little house on Madison Street from Alvin Green and he and Minerva lived there until his death in 1877 at which time Minerva's daughter Betsy and her husband John Frazier moved in with her. Upon Minerva's decease, in 1879, the house was sold to Edward and Barbara Koch.

Edward Koch had been born in Germany and when 18 years of age, emigrated to America and settled in Ross Township about 1875. In 1878 he was united in marriage to Barbara Hoffman, daughter of Thomas Hoffman. The following year he purchased the Saxton cottage, where several of their children were born. Working as a farm laborer, he saved a little each year, until he had accumulated a sufficient sum to purchase a farm of his own. Selling to Ernest Walters in 1887, Edward moved to his new farm on West 73rd Avenue.

At the turn of the century, the house became the property of Alvah and Jennie Saxton. Alvah, a grandson of Ebenezer, occupied the house till 1924, at which time he moved to a new home on Broadway. Renting out the old home on Madison Street

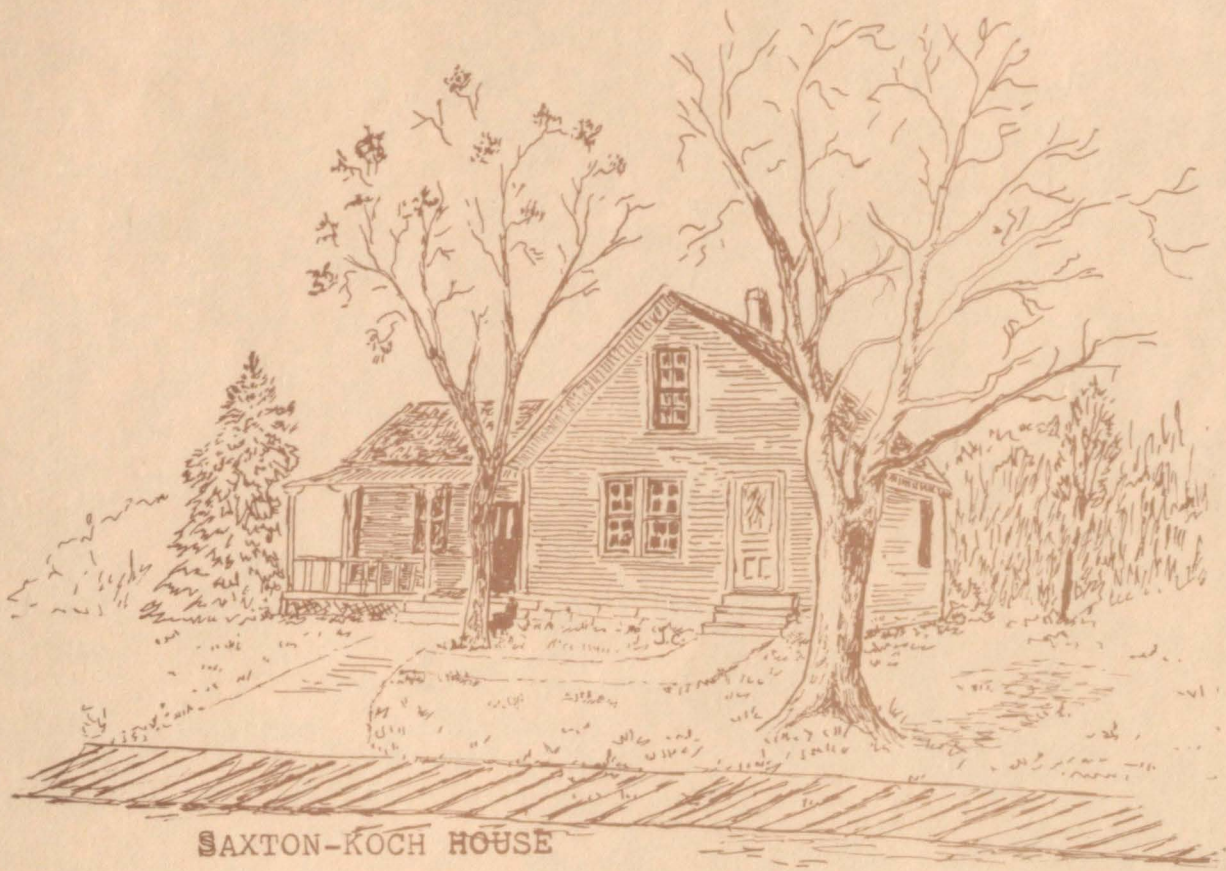


until 1935, (one of the renters being Alvah's son Herbert, and daughter-in-law Nora Edna (Pierce) Saxton, whose two daughters, Edith Flora and Geneva Eberhardt, still live in the area). He then sold it to Ted Houchin, who remodeled the dwelling both inside and out. Ted, a one time trustee of Ross Township and a County Truant Officer, lived there till about 1960.



MR. AND MRS. HERBERT SAXTON  
WEDDING PICTURE





Front row; Mr. and Mrs. Alvah Saxton and Geneva Saxton Eberhardt. Second row; Nora Pierce Saxton, Erma Saxton, Edna Saxton Boyd, and Charles Boyd.





Mr. and Mrs. A. Saxton



Nora Pierce Saxton  
Age six  
1890



## MERRILLVILLE TRAIN STATION

A web of railroad routes began to spread throughout the country as early as 1830 shortly after the first steam engines were built. Gradually stations were established in towns on the periphery of Ross Township but it was not until 1876 that a railroad came through Merrillville, Indiana.

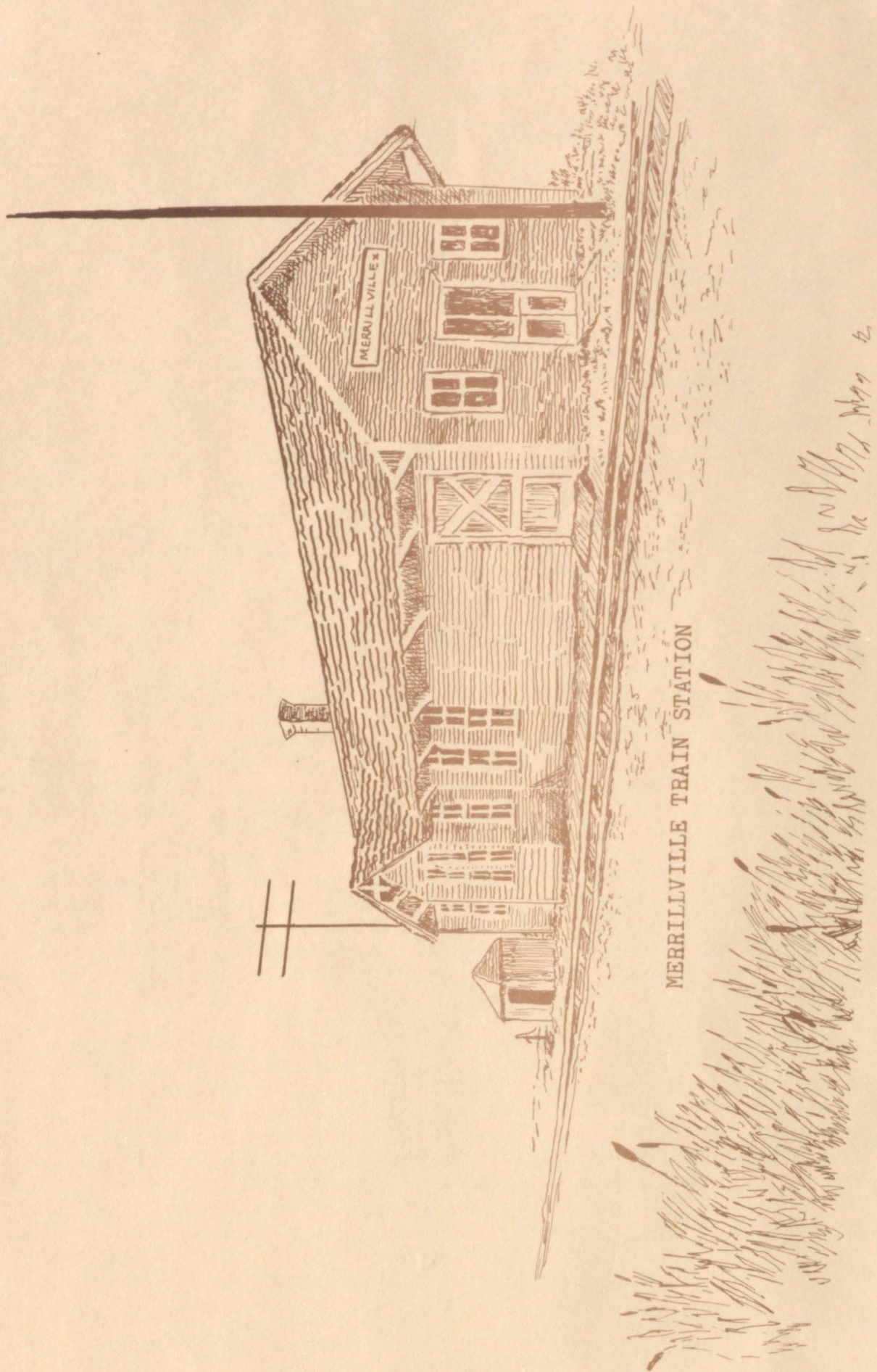
Railroads offered people an opportunity to travel farther faster, facilitated communication between widely separated areas, and allowed producers to expand the range of their markets. No list of superlatives, no matter how extensive, could adequately convey the impact the railroads have had on the growth and development of the country in general and of our area in particular.

Soon after the railroad was established here, the federal government made an attractive offer of cheap travel rates for immigrants that precipitated a tremendous influx of people in this and other areas. Free land in the western states was offered to homesteaders and with the low rate of traveling on a train, a man could commandeer an entire box car for himself and his family, loading it up with furniture, farm equipment, food, supplies and livestock. The family lived in the boxcar and tended to the animals until such time as the car was set off on a side track in the vicinity of their intended home. Many young people who lived here in the early days were homesteaders who traveled in this fashion including members of the Guernsey family.

The C & O came to Merrillville in 1876 and the Chicago and Grand Trunk followed in 1880. The Grand Trunk had station houses in Ainsworth and Lottaville. (The stationhouse in Lottaville was wooden and is now completely obliterated.) The day when Merrillville would require such a facility was still off in the future.

Under the persuasion of Bartlett Woods and other influential townspeople a milk run was established on the Grand Trunk that started modestly with 16 cans of milk picked up a day and escalated to the point where two full cars were required to carry all the milk. Farmers carried their milk cans in horse drawn wagons to various pick up points along the tracks to await the arrival of the so called "dummy" trains to Chicago. Though not designed for passenger comfort, Merrillville residents often rode the "dummy" to the Windy City ("If they didn't mind how long it took to get there") for a day of shopping and would return that night on the train







bringing back the empty milk cans. These "dummies" faithfully made their daily round trip for forty years, failing to run just once when a snowdrift in Lottaville stalled it.

Passenger service finally came to Merrillville after 1900 on the C & O Railroad and with it came the need for a station house. In 1903 the station house was erected on the north side of the tracks near the corner of 73rd Avenue and Broadway. The station was comprised of a ticket office, a waiting area and a four room apartment where the station agent and his family lived. Benjamin Reder was one of several agents who lived in the house over the years. His son, Howard (who with his son John, returned to this area in 1908 after a long absence) recalls his childhood days in the station house and chuckles at the memory of guests complaining of sleeplessness when they visited the Reder family. The rattling and shaking of the wooden cars as they rolled past, the hissing and sighing of the steam engine, and the clacking of the wheels were sounds to which the Reders were well accustomed. Unfazed by the racket, they slept peacefully, while their company tossed fitfully or sat bolt upright when a locomotive with whistle screaming, thundered into the station drawing its caravan of rattling cars behind it.

Passenger trains meant more than convenient travel to Merrillville residents. They connoted adventure to those who could not afford the expense of journeys to far away cities; talking to the returning passengers was an enriching and educational experience. It was not uncommon for many people in town to turn out for the arrival of the Sunday train and greet the passengers as if something of the mystique of their experiences could be magically imparted to the bystanders through the act of waving.

Like everything else, there were great changes in the history of the railroads. Fewer passengers traveled on the trains after mass production of the automobile made it possible for more families to purchase a car. Most railroads were making more money on their freight trains than on their passenger trains, and found they could not continue to service many small towns. Among the towns which lost their passenger service was Merrillville, and in 1946, Harlan Cain, the last ticket agent in this area, and many Merrillville residents watched as the last passenger train pulled out.

In the late 1960's the train station was donated to the Ross Township Historical Society. They had hoped to use the sixty-four year old building as a museum in Ross Township, but due to financial difficulties this plan was not realized and the building was later removed.

Mr. Herman Reed



## LADIES AID SOCIETY

One of the most interesting historical buildings (no longer standing) in old time Merrillville, was the dwelling known to Merrillville oldtimers as Merrill Hall. The long narrow one-story structure was built around 1855 by Duddly Merrill to be used as a cheese factory. There were no windows on the sides, just two in front on either side of a door approached by wooden steps, a typical store type building.

Though not designed to be a meeting area, the cheese factory became just that when Charles Merrill donated the hall and its 3/4 lot to the Church for the express purpose of housing the Ladies Aid Society or as it was called in later years, The Women's Society of the Christian Church.

The organization was established with the goal of helping to raise funds for the community's First Methodist Church. But the objectives became broader in reality as the Society became a wide spectrum charity organization with activities ranging from visiting the sick to sponsoring young people's social gatherings. Thus the group was an asset to the community in more ways than in financing the Church. It was a social instrument whereby the women could pool their efforts and energies to improve the quality of community life. A partial list of their activities included:

Chicken suppers: Years ago the ladies fried chicken on a kerosene stove and placed an oven on top of the stove to bake chicken pies also.

Bazaars: The ladies made hand towels, pot-holders, shade-pulls, toys, etc. and sold them on special occasions.

Sewing circle: Committees made quilts to sell.

Bake sales: Mrs. Lillian Pierce, an active member of the Organization, let the Society take advantage of her convenient across the street location in that she would collect all the pies and baked goods which the ladies would send to her home on the school bus and take them to the Hall.

Aiding the sick: Many of the members were always ready to help the sick and their families.

Sponsoring young people's activities: e.g. the eighth grade graduation exercises which included refreshments, entertainment (songs from the





At the home of W. G. Woods  
Sept. 24, 1914

Ladies Aid Society



children) and intermingling of friends and neighbors.

The Society also made the Hall available to the Community to hold elections.

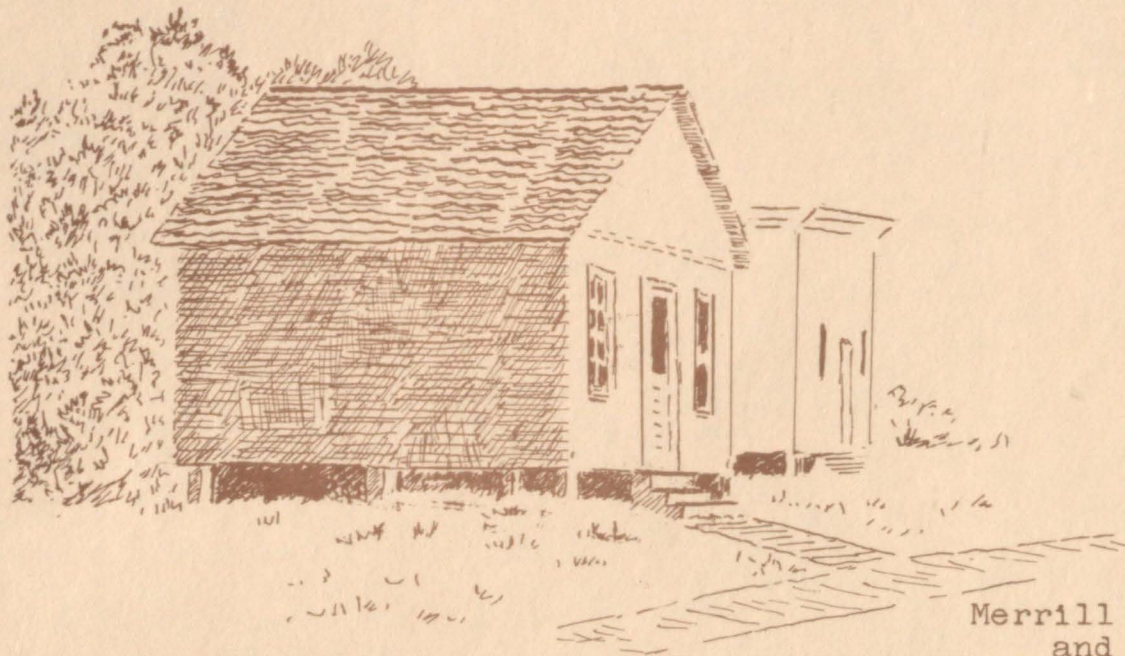
Over the years many ladies contributed to the Organization's success, in fact too many to list here. Some who served the Society were: 1. Mrs. Louise Merrill who gave generously of her time to both the Organization and the Church. The Merrills generously donated the Hall and a large amount of their time and effort to the organization. 2. Edna Saxton, who was a diligent and devoted member for twenty years. 3. Alice Coffey Pierce who was church organist and secretary. She also served as president for fifteen years. 4. Mrs. Severance who was a capable president. 5. Mrs. Henry Kuehl who along with her husband, devoted much of their time to the Society. Mrs. Nettie Niksch, Mrs. Marion Pierce, Mrs. Seymour Wayman, Mrs. Homer Iddings, Mrs. Caroline Randolph, Mrs. Silas Zuvers, and Miss Angie Glazier, were some of the ladies that served on the committees that administered assistance in time of sickness and death. Most often a floral offering was sent to the families who suffered a death.

These hardworking ladies and many more who lent their energies to good works and supporting their Church were motivated by strong religious convictions. As Mrs. Edith Hire put it, "God sat in the middle of the group."

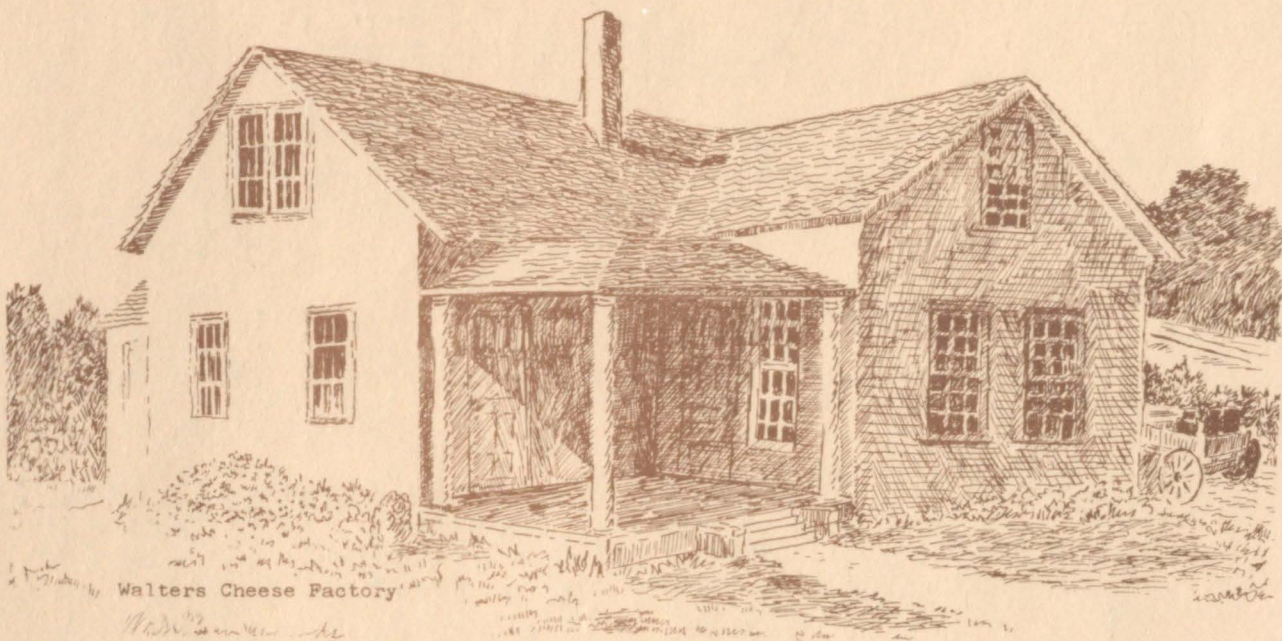
The accompanying illustration and photograph show the Hall and some of the Society members. (Photographed in the fall of 1914.) The house in the background was the home of William G. Woods, who was among the few male members of the Society. Pictured left to right are: First row-Mrs. Fred Ewing, Mrs. Eleanor Woods, Ruth, Wilbur, and Bartlett Woods, Mrs. Henry Kuehl and her children, Blanche, Lillian, and Mildred: Irma Sader and daughter Mabel; Carrie Douglas, Mrs. Mae Pierce and Marian Pierce. Second Row; Mrs. Harper, Mrs. Wayman, Mrs. Sam Woods, Mrs. Will Woods, Mrs. Gebhart, Mrs. Will Smith, Mrs. Scott Burge, Mrs. Caroline Randolph, Mrs. Louise Walters, and Mr. Will Smith. Third Row: Mrs. Lydia Zuvers, Ella Arnold, Jennie Saxton, Belle Blachly, Mary Muzzall, Lillian Pierce, Alice Pierce, Eva Blachly, Carrie Phillips, Mary Demmon, Harry Woods, Lydia Loyce, Myiel Pierce, Mrs. Mau, Min Loyce, Will Woods, Lucinda Goodrich, and Carrie Goodrich.

Mrs. Edith Hire





Merrill Hall  
and  
Ladies Aid Society



Walters Cheese Factory



## THE OLD CHEESE FACTORY

Ernest Walters built this factory in 1880 for the purpose of housing his magical operation of turning ordinary, health giving milk into a savory solid that was capable of adding substance and flavor to sandwiches, of enhancing the taste of wine, and of topping apple pie.

At one time Ernest had a factory on Walters Avenue but he relocated to the southwest side of the C & O Railroad on Harrison Street, where he built a two-story frame building to house his large business. Here he was able to take advantage of proximity to the Township's busy square. He was not limited to local patronage however; Ernest traveled as far as Hammond, Indiana, in his horse and buggy to peddle his hefty rolls of cheese for \$3.00 apiece.

Known far and wide by his nickname, "Cheese Henry," Ernest was much appreciated by the local farmers as they found in him a market for their slightly soured milk that was not suitable for shipping to Chicago on the "Dummy" Train. The fact that the milk was on the verge of curdling was certainly no hindrance to the cheese making process.

Ernest's goodies, besides being found in country kitchens, were also featured at the local taverns. In those days the tavern owners furnished free food to their liquor drinking customers.

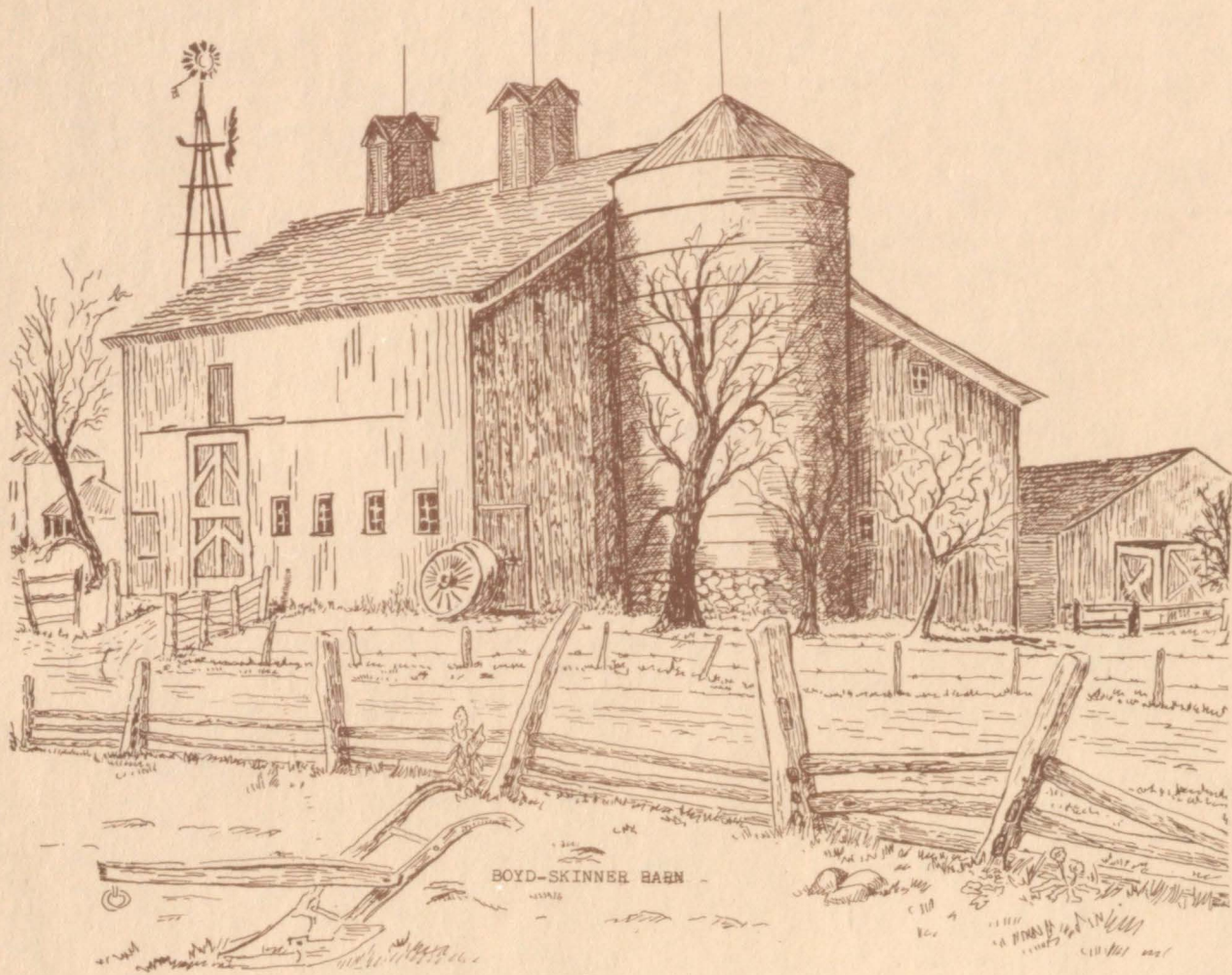
The building which was turned into a house upon Ernest's retirement, looks small, but has nine rooms. The house is still much the same as it was when Ernest had it, save for the absence of an entrance on the North side that was used for unloading milk or loading cheese into wagons. Also the interior is believed to have been remodeled.

There have been several owners including John Zeimet, a widower, who sold the house to Mr. Henry and Mary (Popp) Vonderheid, who lived in the house seventy years. Four of their children were born in the house. Currently the house is owned by Mrs. Marge Kross.

## BOYD-SKINNER BARN

This immense old barn stands as a visual reminder of the importance of farming to the economy of this area. Its location on East 73rd Avenue, right near the old business section of town is significant in that it points to the debt society owes the farmers, i.e. the fact that there would be no businesses to speak of were it not for pioneer farmers who developed production methods that have the potential to feed the world, freeing others from the burden of subsistence level farming





and allowing the to pursue other trades and professions. Today the barn, sans silo, is used for storage of hay and grain and is a favorite of local artists, particularly art students of Pierce Jr. High and the summer art class taught by Mr. Wilde.



## SCHILLO HOMESTEAD

The Schillo clan is yet another one of those German families who have been prominent factors in the agricultural development of this township. Out of a wilderness they established grain and dairy farms which later contributed substantially to the growing community.

John Schillo was born in Trier, Germany, in 1826. He, in the company of his brothers and sisters, his Uncle Jacob, and several other families of the same area, came to America in 1843. This large group of Germans left their native home because they were afraid the government would press into armed service to maintain the nearly continual German war efforts of those years, their minor children.

In New York, the families each purchased a covered wagon, food, and other necessary items, and traveled together across the country. Many of them settled in Lake County, among them John Schillo and his family. The older brothers and sisters, pooling their resources, purchased a farm near the Hobart line where they lived with their Uncle until their marriage.

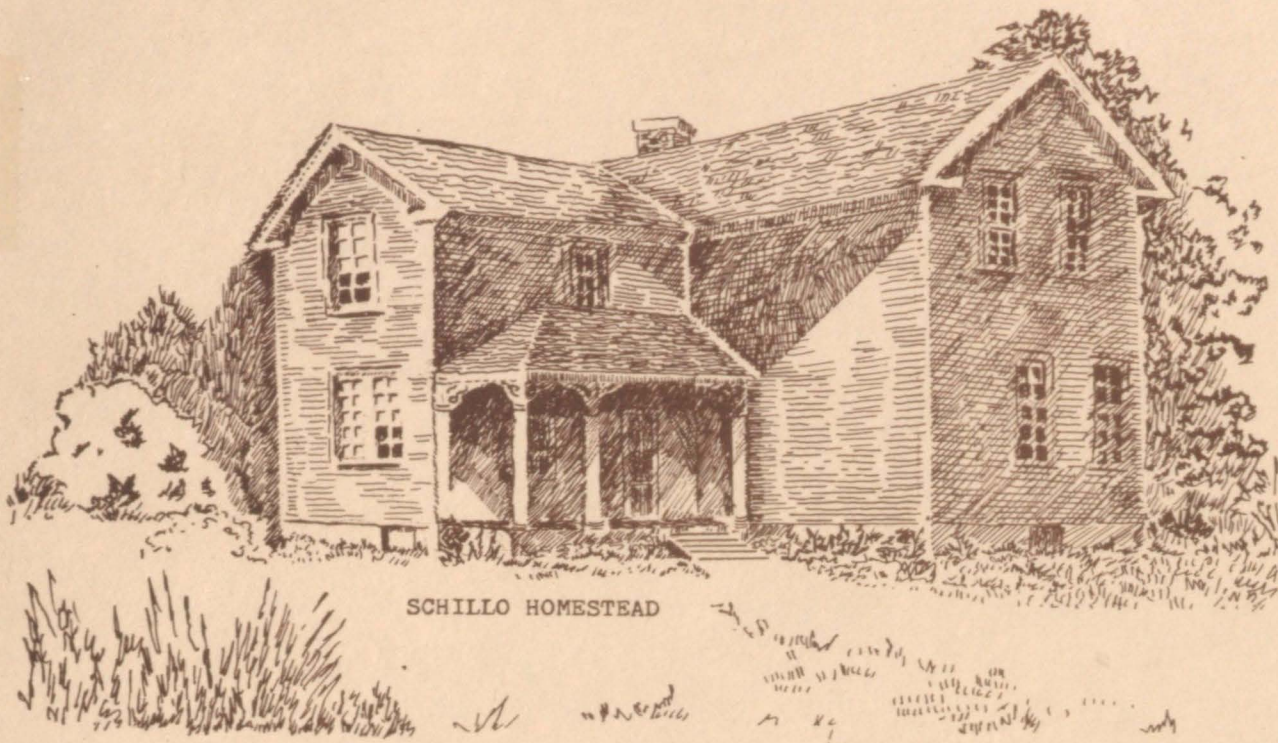
John was but 15 years of age when he arrived in Ross Township, and it was not till 1849 that he married and purchased his own land, which was located in Turkey Creek, a German settlement in Ross Township. Like most pioneers he erected a fairly good size log cabin, where he lived for many years, and where the majority of his children were born. He began his career as a farmer on a tract of eighty acres, and, by economy and perseverance, accumulated sufficient funds to enlarge his farm, and eventually had 163 acres in his possession.

At first all farm work was done by hand, tying oats and hay with twine, pushing a one-horse plow across the dusty fields, and dropping seeds in handmade dirt hills. Eventually he purchased a large threshing machine and other modern equipment.

Hard work, determination, and thriftiness finally enabled John to finance the presently standing two-story frame dwelling which is located on the southwest side of the Grand Trunk Railroad on Harrison Street. The big rambling house is much larger than it originally was when John built it. Several additions have been made by successive generations of the family. The accompanying illustration represents the original state of the old farmhouse.

The present owners are Mr. and Mrs. William E. Smith, who have been living in the Old Schillo House for more than thirty years. Mr. Smith is the nephew of Mathias Smith, an early pioneer settler whose house is described on other pages of this book.





#### HAYWARD HOUSE

The Hayward House, located three miles east of Merrillville, once the home of George Hayward, was built about 1870. George came from an old aristocratic, strait laced English family, was the son of a well-to-do farmer, and was early instructed in the details of that occupation. Soon after his marriage to Mary Ann Sykes, he purchased 160 acres of farm land on the Old Sauk Trail and built the present two-story brick structure. Very little detail was employed in the designing of the house, and that which he did use is simple and in good taste. The entrance in the main section is accentuated by a small transom, and five white, round top windows pierce the red brick facade. The one-story porch, originally much smaller, is now enclosed.

From the kitchen, a steep, enclosed staircase leads to four upstairs bedrooms that were the sleeping chambers of George, Mary Ann, and their three daughters, Emily, Lotta, and Bess.



The main floor contains four rooms which the Hayward family used as kitchen, pantry, parlor, and sitting room. The kitchen, with its high ceiling and wide woodwork, features narrow wood paneling called beaded ceiling, which was quite fashionable in that day. This author stood in the kitchen sipping homemade apple cider graciously proffered by the present owner, and had little difficulty conjuring up an image of Mrs. Hayward in long frock and apron serving as hostess, so powerful is the atmosphere of the time in this home.

In 1905 while Emily and Lotta were visiting in California, Emily died suddenly at the tender age of nineteen. Shortly thereafter George, Mary Ann, and Bess put the house up for rent and moved to Hobart. Lotta stayed behind to become the bride of William Smith.

For 25 years the Hayward homestead housed renters until it was finally sold outside the family in 1930. Today the sole surviving Hayward, Bess, still recalls the warmth and happiness of her childhood years spent in the century old home.





## WAYMAN HOME

The Wayman House was located on west 73rd Avenue on an upgrade set back among aged trees next door to Merrillville's first post office, which was run by Seymour Wayman and his wife, the occupants of the house.

The small but cozy five-room house was built around 1865, and was home to Seymour and Hulda, and later to daughter Carrie and son-in-law, Alfred Phillips.

Seymour, born in New York in 1833, was a tanner and shoemaker by trade. In 1852, he was married to Mary Stilwell by whom he had three children. Mary passed away in 1866 leaving widower, Seymour, to raise three children. In 1867, Seymour wed Hulda Green, who presented him with a daughter, Carrie Lucinda.

When Carrie became Mrs. Alfred Phillips, she and her husband resided on a farm located three miles west of the town of Merrillville, where they lived many years, after which time they moved into the little Wayman house where Carrie had spent much of her youth. The Phillips children found rough and ready playmates in Dr. Iddings' five boys, who lived next door.

Carrie and Alfred lived in the Ross Township area all of their lives, and Carrie devoted much of her time and energy to the Ladies Aid Society, for which organization she served in several capacities, including president. One of Carrie's daughters, Mrs. Elmer Stowell, has also spent her life in this area. For many years, she lived around the corner from her folks; she currently resides in Crown Point.

The Wayman House was torn down some years ago to make room for a modern brick house.



Seymour and Hulda  
Wayman





First postoffice in Merrillville. Build 1844

Mr. Joel Glazier  
married  
Mrs. Huldah Green Wayman.  
June<sup>2</sup> 1915



The wayman House. Huldah Green Wayman and her second husband, Joel Glazier



## MERRILLVILLE POST OFFICE

Centerville was renamed Merrillville, Indiana, when the town established its first post office, which was located next to the present day Kolby Garage on west 73rd Avenue. The town was named after the industrious and influential Merrill brothers who were numerous during the early days and who still have descendants living in the Lake County area.

Letters were carried by fast horseback and sometimes by stagecoaches. The cost of sending mail this way was twenty five cents, and then in 1847, after the United States issued the first postage stamp, the cost was less than three cents. Merrillville residents thought that it was a modern day miracle that the postman delivered mail to and from someone miles away and the entire service cost only a few cents.

Often when a postmaster or postmistress was appointed by the government, they chose to operate from their homes. Records show that about 1885 a post office was run by Silas and Lydia Zuvers in their home, which was located two doors west of the old Methodist Church on U.S. 330.

In 1900 Seymour and Hulda Wayman operated the post office in the original building. They also maintained a shoe repair service in the building so the course of Seymour's day would involve alternating between selling stamps and fixing footwear. The post office during the Wayman postmaster days also had the distinction of having the only gas light in town gracing its front exposure. So important was this beacon to the town that Seymour and Hulda felt obliged to hurry home evenings if they'd been away, to turn on the only light in town.

## LENNERTZ BLACKSMITH SHOP

The Blacksmith Shop was located near what used to be called Merrill Square adjacent to the former brewery-gristmill. Built around 1875 by Mathias Lennertz, it was one of two operations he ran. Initially he had just the smith shop. Later he erected a feed store next door and connected the two buildings with an overhead cover.

Mathias was a native of Ross Township who had married his childhood sweetheart, Barbara Hoffman. The couple had nine children, some of whom Matt put to work for him.



By trade blacksmiths made horseshoes and ox shoes and applied them. Their craftsmanship was not limited to footwear for quadrupeds however. Many produced all kinds of intricate hardware like latches, hinges, andirons, farm tools and even nails. Modern ironworkers use coal in the forges and employ a motor driven fan to force air into the fire. Pioneer smithies used charcoal to heat the metal and had to keep the fire ventilated via the use of enormous bellows that had to be pumped. Usually this task fell to an apprentice, in this case no doubt Matt's son Peter.

Easy going Mathias, who was described as having a twinkle in his eye, ran his shop for forty years before he laid down his hammer for the last time. His retirement more or less coincided with the ushering in of a new era in which the gas engine was king and the workhorse was reduced in importance. Realizing this, son Peter converted the shop into a feed manufacturing and retail store in 1928. In 1929 electricity updated the operation. Peter put his son Charles to work in the feed store and eventually Charles took over the business. Appropriately enough Charles ran the first hardware store in Merrillville. In 1945 the old wood building was remodeled so that cement blocks covered the wooden walls. Charles ran the hardware business for six years, then sold it to Andy Ban. Now Charles owns and operates Lennertz Fire Place and Patio Store in the Merrillville Area.



MATHIAS LENNERTZ BLACKSMITH SHOP  
AND FEED STORE



## MERRILLVILLE SCHOOLS

The history of our area's formal education system begins in 1838 with the establishment of loosely structured class sessions in Deep River. The year 1840 saw the construction of Centerville's first school, a log building with puncheon floor, furnished with split log benches and a single desk for the teacher. The school, which was located near the site of the present day Chatterbox Tavern in Merrillville, exemplifies the type of pulling together our pioneer fathers employed to carve a civilization out of a wilderness. These people wanted their children to be able to read and write, and attaining this goal required sharing of time, effort, and resources. For instance, the school had to be heated, so each family in turn was responsible for supplying one load of wood. Books were scarce and few folks could afford them, so the pupils shared what texts were available. Drinking water had to be carried to the school, and this task was also rotated. Teachers who could not find economical living accommodations for their salary of \$14.00 per month, took turns boarding in their various pupils' homes for stretches of two weeks at a time.

Classes in the Deep River School, unlike the Centerville situation, were not conducted in a building especially designated for that purpose. In 1844, Mrs. Richard Vincent embarked on a fifteen year career of teaching students in her home, beginning with a class of seven children. Later, a frame school was built, destroyed by fire, and rebuilt. Finally around 1870, a new building (see illustration) was erected in a new location, on land donated by the Harms family, a site that is presently occupied by the home of Mrs. Donald Niksch on 330, three miles east of Merrillville. Originally, it was a one room school house; later it became two. The building had the luxury of a water pump right out front, and featured the universally known symbol of schools and churches, a bell atop its roof. (Incidentally, Mrs. Niksch still has the bell in her possession.) Olive Wood was one of the teachers there.

In later years, the school fell into disuse and the land, instead of reverting to the donor (Harms), as was the custom, was instead purchased by relatives of the donors, namely the Donald Niksch family. The former school became a dance hall and tavern run by Edward Niksch, but during Prohibition, he was forced to close it as it didn't "pay as much". The building was then converted into a home and later into apartments.

In memory of Donald Niksch  
By Ruth Niksch



In 1848, Ross Township had been legally designated a Township and divided up into districts and by 1882, there were sixteen school districts including Deep River, Ainsworth, Adams, Vincent, Hurlburt, Witherall (located between Harrison and Cleveland, east of the Sanitorium), Browns Point (west of the Sanitorium), Green, Butler (across the road from Palmer Farm), Woods (57th and Chase), and the Merrillville Primary. In 1896, the Ross Township School System became a single unit and the district schools fell under its jurisdiction. Mrs. Myra Prott was one of the teachers who conducted lessons in the Vincent School following the merger "as it were." She began her career at age seventeen and handled the teaching demands of all eight grades in 1918 and 1919, then lightened her load to the first four grades in 1919 and 1920.

The first brick school in Merrillville was built in 1865 on the location of the present Town Hall, one half block west of Broadway on 330. There was only one other brick school in all of Lake County, a fact that intensified residents' pride in the two-story, four room, red brick building with its attractive white trim and wooden sidewalk leading into it.

In those days no janitorial or maintenance staffs were employed by the System, and the chore of keeping the school clean fell to the teacher and pupils. This was a particularly onerous task on days when the stove pipe would get clogged and cause the stove to blow up or the pipes to fall down. On some occasions, the smoke and soot from the inefficient heater would necessitate early dismissal of classes, a situation that did not likely cause the students much grief or regret. Some of the teachers who had to cope with such catastrophes included Mr. Zubec, who presided over the seventh and eighth grade sessions, and Edna Frazier, who taught grades one through six.

Many children rode the horse drawn bus to the Merrillville Primary School much to the good natured contempt of their elders who considered the younger generation pampered for not having to brave the elements. Comparatively speaking from today's viewpoint, it still would have required something of the pioneer spirit to endure an hour's ride in a vehicle that could hardly lay claim to having been designed for comfort. Some of the more luxurious models featured a stove to stave off the polar winds ripping through the canvas curtains on the side of the bus. What's more, the wagons would often get mired down in the mud and it probably occurred to the young men, who had to wrestle with the wagon to free it, that their lot might have been easier if they had gotten to school under their own steam.

The school itself lacked several items which are not considered luxuries by today's standards; most notably indoor



rest room facilities and drinking fountains. The drinking water was kept in a bucket in the room with a single cup that was passed from one student to the other so that each could partake of the lukewarm liquid.

Lessons in the three R's, 'readin', 'ritin', and 'rithmetic', plus geography and physiology, were conducted from books the students brought from home. Many families owned copies of McGuffey's Reader and Ray's Arithmetic, and lent these texts to the effort of educating their children. The teachers, whose license to instruct was issued after a few weeks of college level training and the passing of a County Exam, were often in their teens, a situation which allowed for some lengthy careers. For example, Laura Lennertz taught for forty four years.

The high point of the students' education was their graduation from the eighth grade. Ceremonies were held in Merrill Hall (or the Methodist Church) just down the road, and involved all the eighth graders from all the district schools. Parents and friends were entertained by a program that included songs from the students, recitations, and awarding the diplomas. Of course, refreshments were served following the festivities.

The brick building that was the Merrillville Primary School was also used for town meetings, church school and church services. In 1896 it became the nucleus of Merrillville's first high school, as rooms, gables and a bell were added. Under the guidance of Dr. H. L. Iddings, as trustee, secondary school level courses were offered to three students: Alta Halstead, Christina Lennertz, and Cora Pierce, all of whom were allowed to progress at their own rate. All three women eventually chose to teach, and later on, Alta took up the study of law and was admitted to the Bar.

For a number of years the school underwent changes in the duration of the program offered. For example, between 1901 and 1908, the length of the program changed from two years under Mr. Quillen to one year taught by Mr. O. A. Cassidy, to two years under Mr. Goodpastor.

For a few years, two high schools operated in Ross Township, namely Merrillville and Ainsworth Schools. Miss Ellmore, then Harry B. Calpha, followed by Richard Nazum, conducted classes at Merrillville. Miss Wood taught the Ainsworth School. In 1923, under trustee Roy Hack, the two schools were consolidated with O.K. Appleman as principal and Miss Wood as assistant.



The high school was given full commission in 1925 and by this time the program had expanded to encompass history, science, business courses, English, agriculture, and music. Mr. T. D. Fox was principal during this period of growth, and during his term a new building was erected to house the lower six grades. Unfortunately, it burned one year after its doors opened, necessitating a rebuilding project. Mr. Raymond Lemmel succeeded Mr. Fox as principal in 1931, and Mr. Emil Buchfuhrer served as trustee. In 1939, Mr. Claud York became principal and Mr. Holmes the trustee. Under their leadership, an addition was made to the school that provided facilities for home economics, shop, business education, vocational agriculture, and a cafeteria.

Yet another addition was made while Edgar L. Miller was principal, and Mr. Houchin was trustee. At this point, Merrillville's steadily increasing enrollment and expanding facilities won a vote of approval from the state in the form of a first class commission for the high school.

In 1951, Henry Fieler took over as trustee and worked assiduously to obtain membership in the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. Merrillville High School became part of the Association in 1953.

The year 1954 saw the construction of a new building a few blocks north and one east of the old building. The school began operation in 1955 and has already been graced by several additions. No doubt a large part of the thirty acre plot will be utilized over the years as enrollments climb relentlessly upward and the need for ever more sophisticated facilities increases. Merrillville currently boasts such features as a pool, spacious auditorium, and an exceptional cafeteria. The current principal, Mr. Robert Clark, is a newcomer to the school system, having been a part of it for three years, and it is anticipated that he will perpetuate the far-sighted policies of his predecessors.

In recent years, the structure of the school system has been altered such that all of the institutions are under the jurisdiction of the Board of Education and the Superintendent of Ross Township Schools. Dr. Donald Kaupke, the current superintendent, works with the Board in much the same capacity as the former trustees did, to ensure the successful coordination of programs to maximize the benefits available to all the town's pupils. Such responsibilities as the type of curriculum to be offered, and the maintenance of academic standards fall to this guiding hierarchy.



The development of the town's two junior high schools, Harrison and Pierce, has been of immeasurable value in broadening the foundation the student has prior to beginning more advanced study at the high school level. Harrison Jr. High, having been built in 1971, is very modern in design and in outlook. Mr. Larry Martin, an eight year veteran of the town school system, is responsible for the smooth operation of the institution as its principal. Pierce Jr. High is under the guidance of principal John Lisman, who brings many years of experience in the field of education to his job. Pierce was built in 1928 and has been remodeled to update the facade and the facilities. The building has a unique "homey" atmosphere to it due largely to the carpeted floors and to the muraled hallways. Moreover, Pierce boasts a planetarium, an asset that has limitless educational entertainment possibilities.

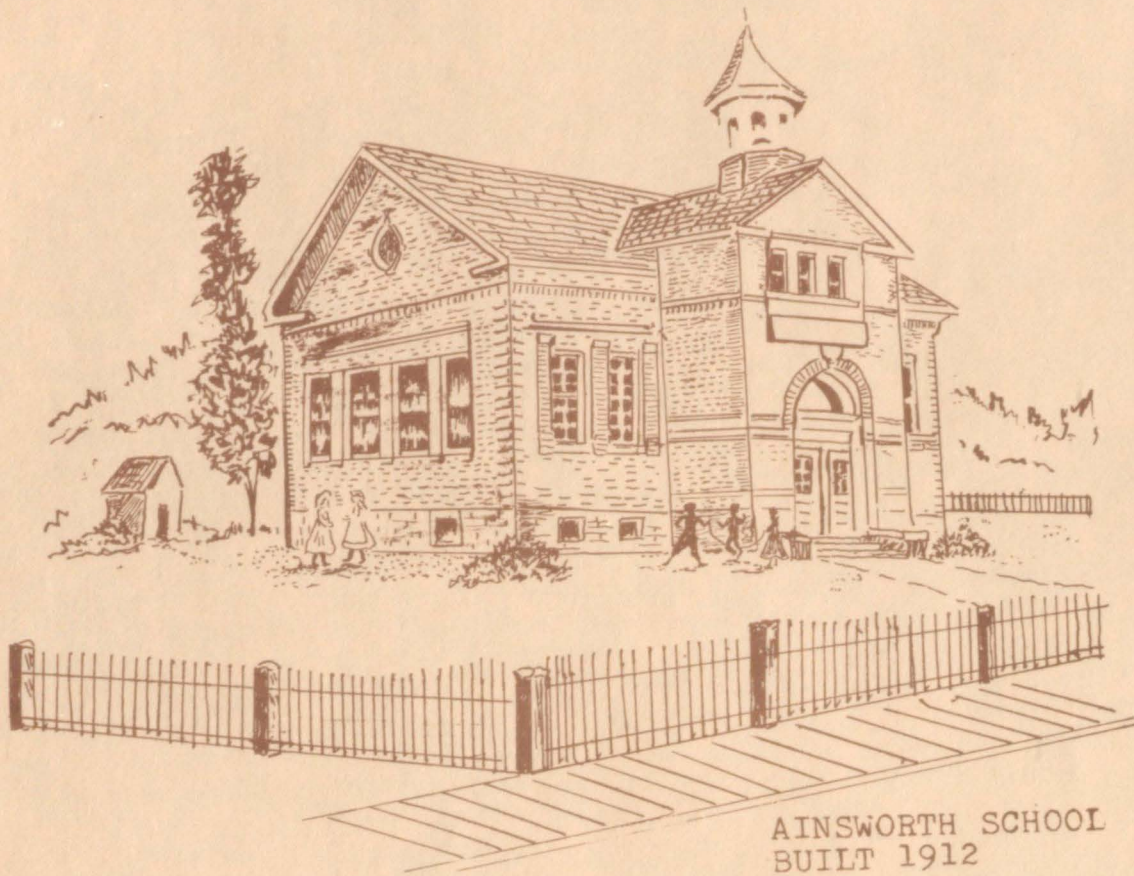
In Merrillville there are currently five elementary schools that undertake the awesome task of transforming our inarticulate or even babbling youngsters into literate adolescents able to communicate with the adult world. A list of these institutions and their principals follows:

Edgar L. Miller School.....	Mr. Robert Tomb
Henry P. Fielser School.....	Mr. George Putz
Homer Iddings School.....	Mr. Robert Moore
Jonas E. Salk School.....	Mr. Daniel Smith
John Wood School.....	Mr. Paul Damm

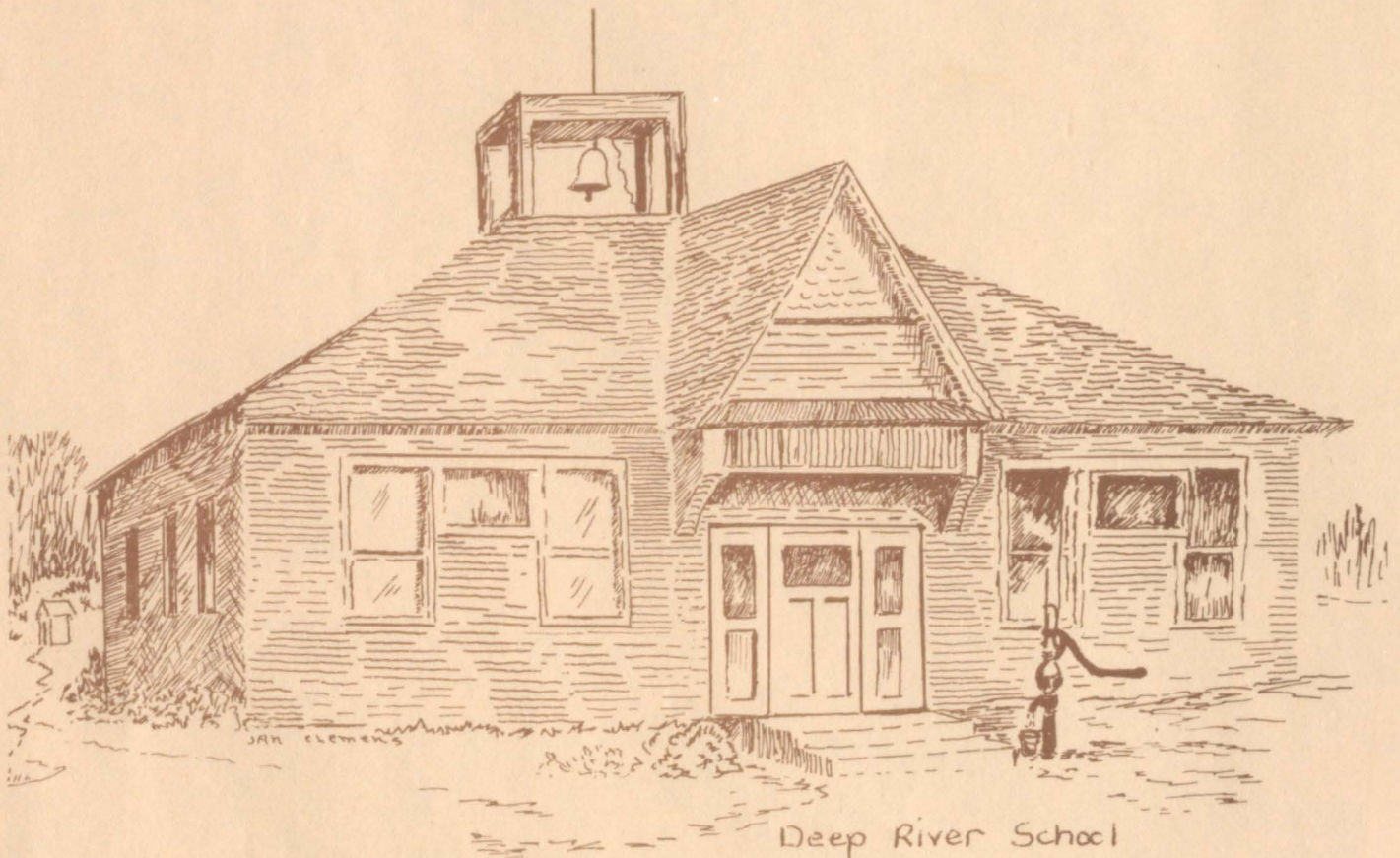


In front of Deep River School-first and second grade.





AINSWORTH SCHOOL  
BUILT 1912



Deep River School

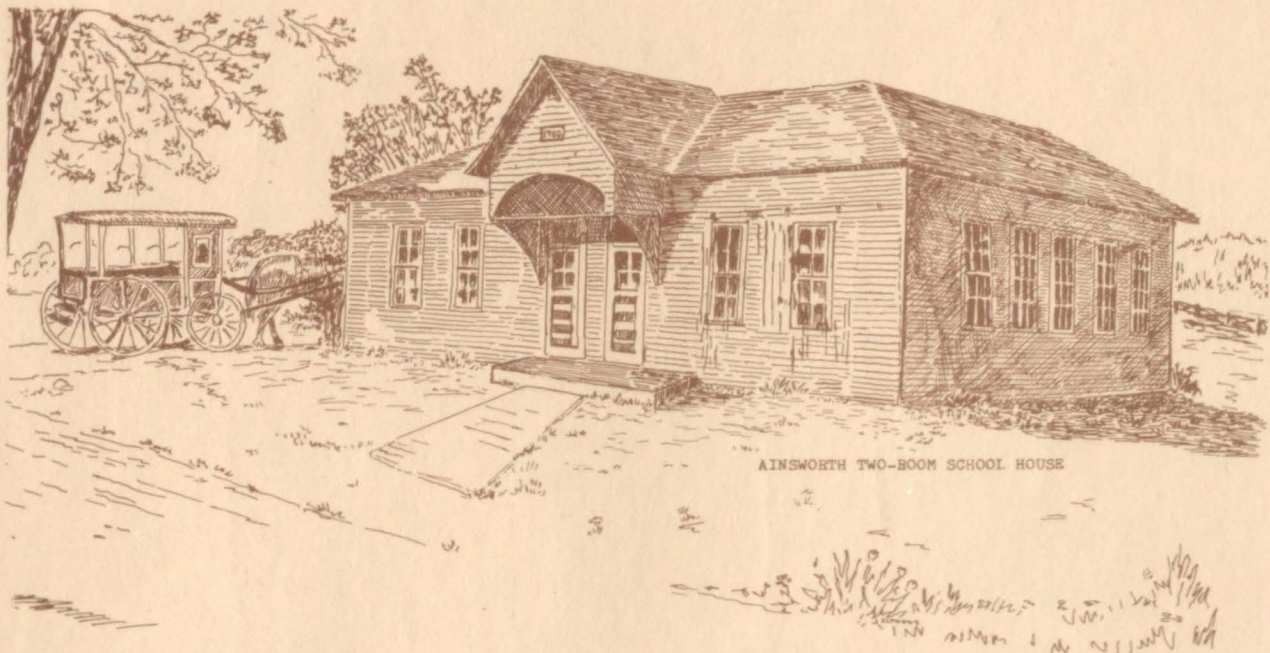


## THE TWO-ROOM AINSWORTH SCHOOL HOUSE

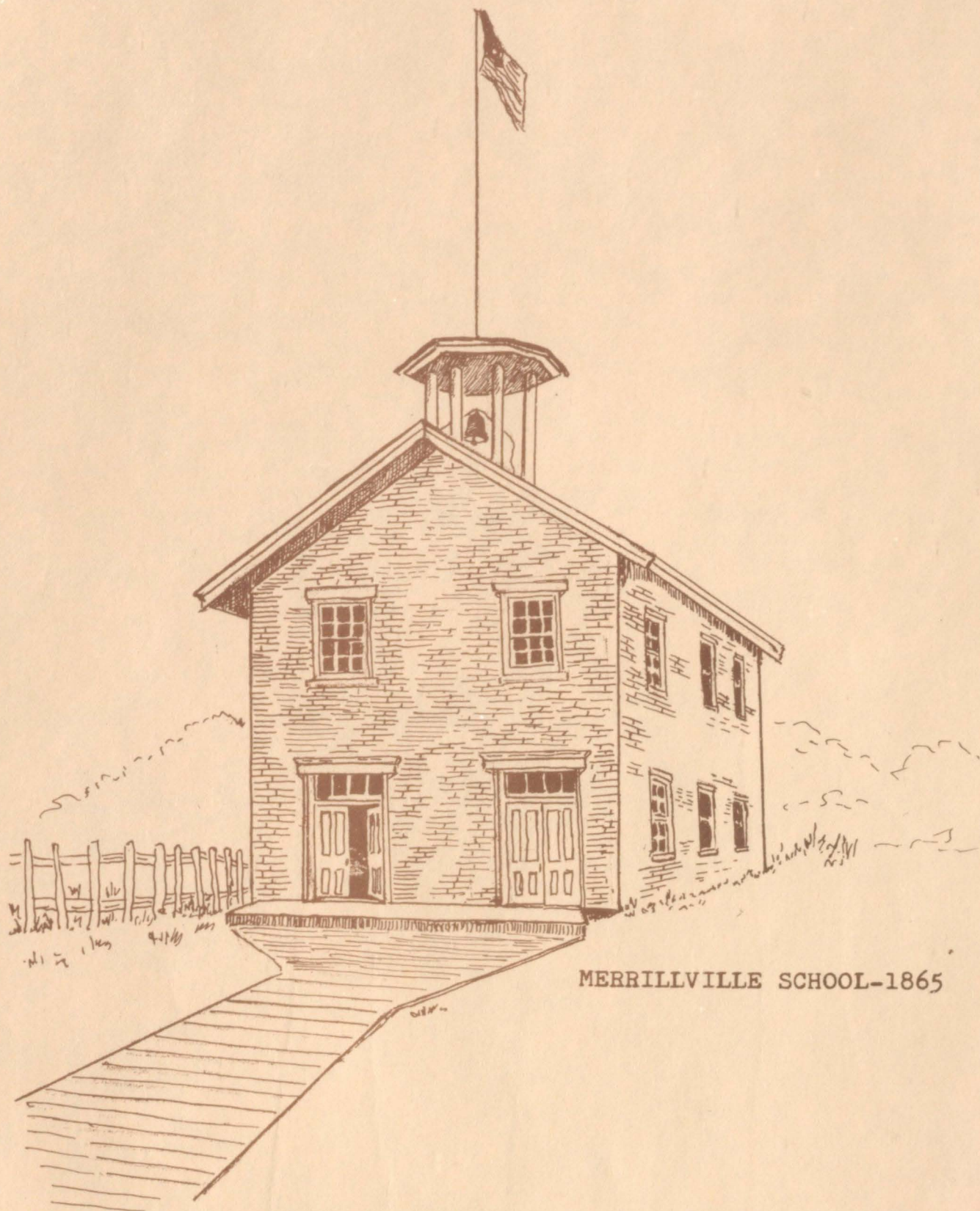
The Ainsworth School, located on the road of the same name, was built on land donated by the Foreman family. Originally, the structure was a one room school with a fieldstone foundation that may have been erected circa 1870. Later on a second room was added and the newer section has a brick foundation. A coat closet separates the two rooms. There is a wooden sign on the building dating it to 1900, but the stone foundation is representative of an earlier time period.

The Foreman family not only donated the land but also their time to the school. Mr. Otto Foreman remembers collecting wood to warm the rooms, and in later years he drove the horse drawn bus that delivered the pupils to the school for their lessons with teachers like Nellie Meyers and Olive Wood.

The building has been in disuse for sometime. All tangible traces of the learning process are gone. The building is weather worn and in need of paint. No blackboards or texts are to be found. Yet, somehow, one can visualize the children running and playing on the tree shaded grounds, and the rooms seem to reverberate with the sounds of pupils reciting their lessons.

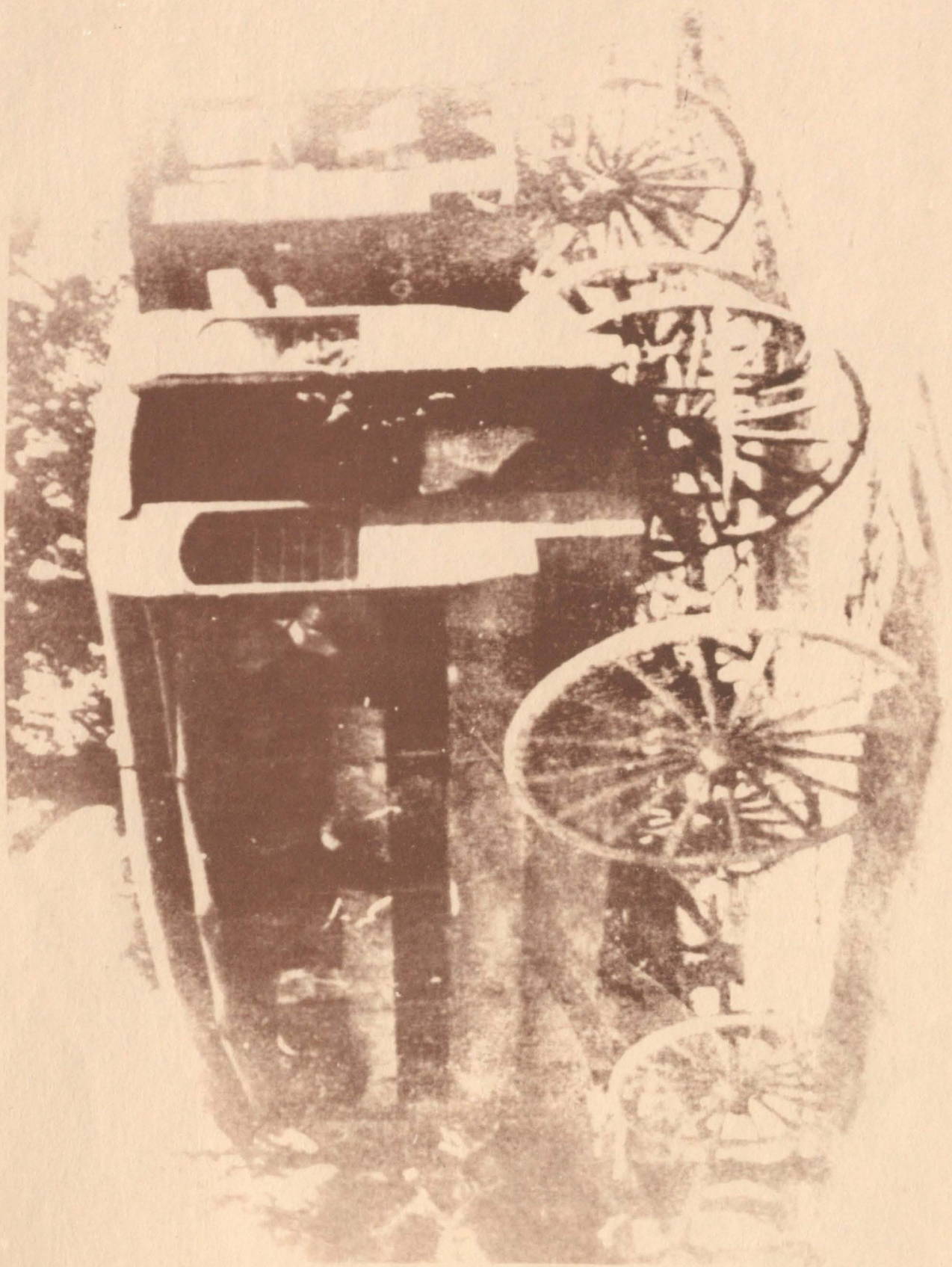






MERRILLVILLE SCHOOL-1865





Ross Township School Bus in the 1800's



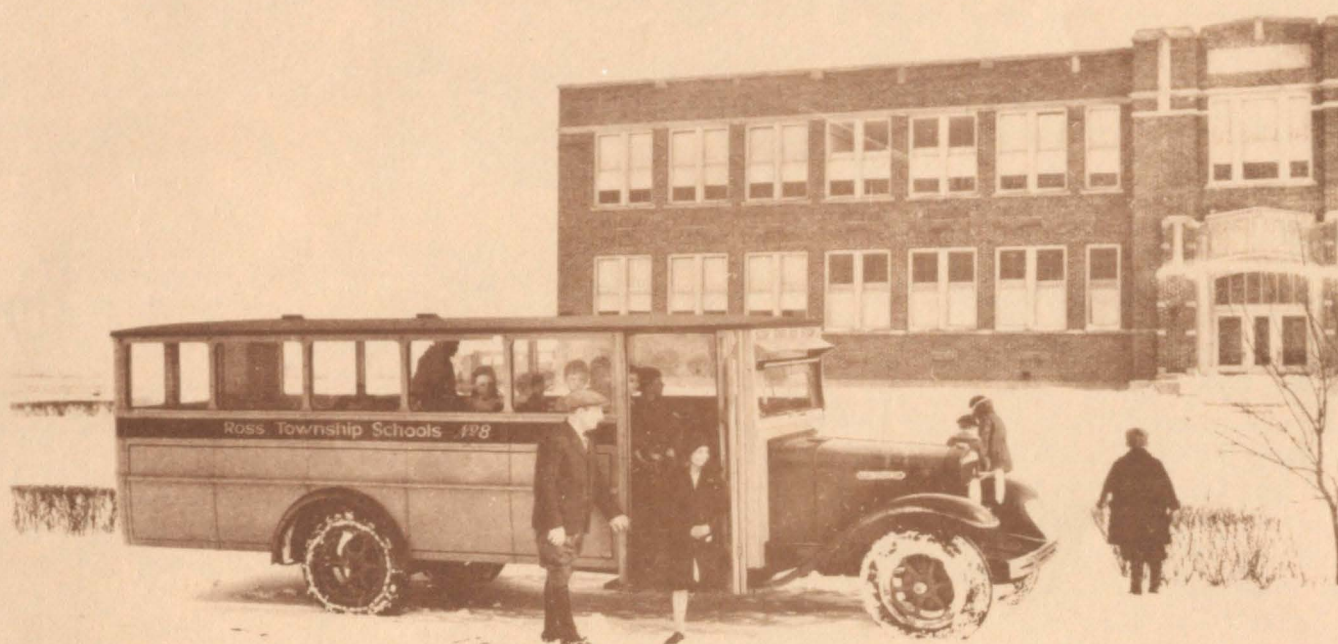


THE TOWN HALL-Formerly the old  
Primary Building. Built 1896





Front Row: Gladys Demmon, Lenore Boyd, Lena Neuman, Emma Neuman, Blanche Kuehl, Edith Pierce, Wilma Popp, Mary Cooper, Goldie Goodrich. Second row: Willis Saxton, Fred Schultz, John Waltz, George Stevens, Lester Borrmann, Lyle Caugherty, Fred Borrmann, Ralph Severance. Third Row: Louis Huth, Milton Carpenter, Florian Seberniac, Robert Popp, Raymond Mau, Maurice Franz, Oliver Kleine. Teacher-Essa Crowell Music teacher- Laura Houk -Primary School



School Bus-1932, in front of Merrillville High School (Pierce now). Bus driver, Charles Boyd





Laura Lennertz

Laura was born to William and Helena (Schillo) Lennertz in 1888. At age 20, she embarked on a teaching career that was to span more than four decades. This patient, gentle woman taught twelve years in Griffith and thirty in Merrillville. Laura never married and resided with her uncle's family (John Schillo). She is fondly remembered as a teacher who could exert discipline from her class without raising her voice, so great was the regard in which she was held. One person was moved to suggest that they should name a school after her because of her remarkable abilities. Laura died in 1957 and had been ailing since 1950, at which time she had suffered a stroke.



## THE MERRILL-PIERCE HOME

The residence pictured here has the double distinction of being the second oldest house in town and of having been the home of William Merrill, who, with his brother Duddly, lent so many of his talents to developing the community that the townspeople honored the pair's contributions by naming the town after them.

As early as 1840, William was operating a general merchandise store in town. By 1850, he had established a blacksmith shop that supplied the thirty or so families in the town not only with horseshoes, but also with nails, hinges, latches, farm tools, and other such pieces of hardware that were indispensable to nineteenth century farmers.

William was a man of high business acumen, and through his capable management, his industry and economy, he accumulated a comfortable estate. In 1857, he had a large two-story home erected on his farm, which was located on the north side of the Old Sauk Trail (E. 73rd Avenue). Originally the house was spanned by a sizeable porch that terminated on the east side. Unusual features were the double hipped roof, and small panel windows spaced symmetrically across the front and sides of the house. The accompanying picture shows the house as it looked in 1932.

Three years after the house was constructed, William died, leaving his wife Caroline with seven children. Caroline continued to live in the house with her children. Son George operated the farm with the assistance of the hired man, John Bonn. In 1875, Caroline married Duddly Merrill and moved to a new location, selling the farm to the Sam White family.

Then, in 1915, the farm became known as the Pierce home. Clifford, son of Marion H. Pierce and Katherine (Horst) Pierce, married Millicent Coleman and they and their five children, Carmen, Joseph, Carol, Marion, and Terry, occupied the former Merrill home.

Pierce owned a substantial amount of farm land that was divided up and sold. Pierce Jr. High is located on a tract of land that used to be part of the Merrill-Pierce farm. The school honors the man from whom it took its name by displaying Clifford's likeness in the school office.



Clifford died in 1973, leaving two of his children in the area. Daughter Carmen still lives on land that was part of the Pierce farm. She is married to Delmar Nelson, owner of Nelson Well and Pump Service. Son Terry resides in the Forest Hills Subdivision with his wife, the former Barbara Rhodes.



The Merrill-Pierce Home-1932

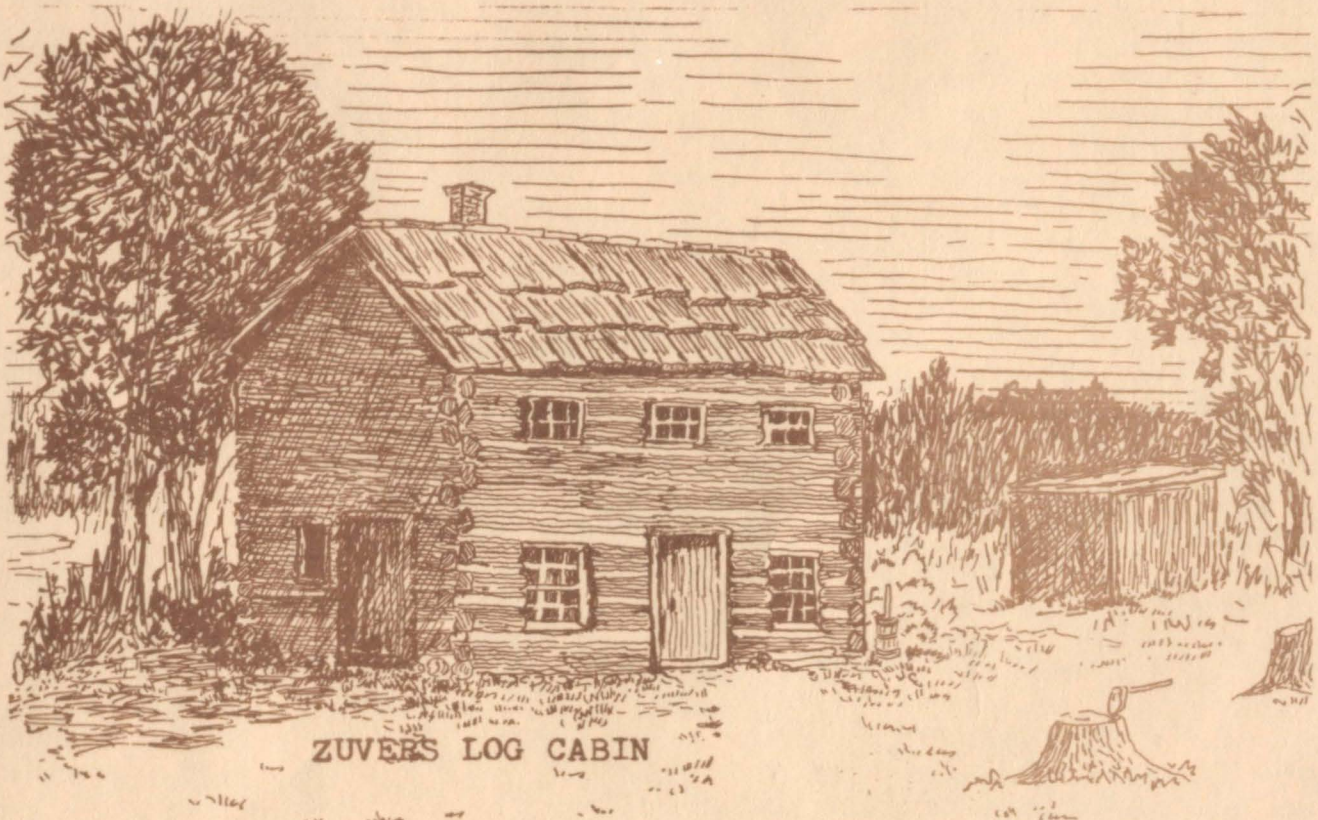


## ZUVERS LOG CABIN

The Zuvers home was located on 73rd Avenue and has the distinction of having been the second house constructed in Merrillville. The two-story cabin, a typical glorified pioneer dwelling executed in logs from trees in the immediate vicinity, built by Mathias Elbert for Amos Zuvers in 1849, reveals a way of life as completely as it does the character of its owner. Amos Zuvers was a rugged individual who trapped, traded, and traveled with the Potawatomi Indians. He spoke their language fluently, and preferred their company to that of many whites. Amos traveled across the country on horseback or foot and it was after his California gold hunting expedition in 1849, that he had the log cabin constructed.

To build the house, Mathias Elvert used a broadax and an adz with a seven inch blade. The adz was shaped like a hoe and was used to give a smooth finish to timber that would show in the cabin.

Upon Amos' death, son Solomon Zuvers occupied the house until 1898, at which time it was sold to Myron Burge, who in turn sold it to Alfred Phillips. Alfred then willed it to his daughter Eleanor Stowell, who eventually sold it to Callen Keaton. Keaton, who lived in the next house west, removed the house in 1946. The cabin was so well built that it had to be dismantled log by log. Houses just aren't built that way anymore.





## GOODRICH HOME

The ancestral home of the Goodrich family is located on Goodrich Road (now Clay Street), about one half mile from the Vincent School. The dwelling was built by Charles Goodrich, son of Thomas and Sara (Boyd) Goodrich. Easy going Charles was raised with his brother Perry, and sisters Annie, Belle, and Evelyn on a farm bordering on Mississippi Street, and applied his knowledge of agricultural methods to his own land to develop a productive grain farm and to raise staples for the family larder.

Charles, wife Carolyn, and their six children, lived comfortably in the two-story framehouse. Their proximity to the Vincent School, which their children attended, made it convenient for the various teachers to board with them, and the Goodriches made their accommodations available to several instructors. One teacher, who is particularly well remembered, was Lillian Keilman.

In addition to doing their part to ensure the future of the educational system by housing its teachers, the Goodriches were also staunch supporters of the Methodist Church. It was a heartwarming sight to behold the family of eight, freshly scrubbed and dressed as befit the occasion, bumping down the lane in their horse and buggy on their way to Sunday services.

Misfortune befell the family in the form of an injury to the head of the household that resulted from a fall from the barn. Charles was sufficiently so debilitated by the accident that he was unable to run the farm. Son Arthur left school and under his mother's guiding hand, assumed responsibility for management of the farm. Carolyn, strong willed and hard working, was no stranger to shouldering burdens that sprang from the tragedies of others. For instance, as if raising her brood of six were not enough for one lifetime, she took in her daughter Cora's children when Cora died, and raised her son Clarence's four children when his wife died.

When Arthur married Henrietta Sullivan, he brought her to the old homestead to live, and there they resided for some ten years, after which time a new home was erected for them on Sullivan land (just across Route 30) in which Henrietta still resides. Arthur is deceased and the couple was childless. Incidentally, Arthur and Henrietta are uncle and aunt to our printer, Mr. George Gill.

Arthur's sister, Ida, and her husband, August Kaiser, moved into the Goodrich home when Arthur and Henrietta vacated it. They stayed two years. In 1939, the old farmhouse was sold to Nipsco and has known a variety of tenants ever since, as the company rents the building out.



The house, though it suffers from neglect due to the absence of a permanent owner to give it the "tender loving care" it deserves, has a certain charm about it that is reminiscent of a summer cottage. Though too large to be called a cottage by any definition, the house has a sheltered quality to it that gives the illusion of smallness, due to the abundance of botanical life around it. Rose vines lace the surface of the house; overgrown flowery bushes surround the building. Old trees seem to stand guard over the house. The house is literally peeking through the vegetation. In contrast to the numerous outbuildings and barns exposed to the elements with no nearby trees to break the wind or shade the wood from the drying of the sun. There is no charm attached to these old buildings, yet the observer can see that they were once an integral part of a busy and prosperous farm.



GOODRICH HOUSE

Mrs. Henrietta (Sullivan) Goodrich





George and Grace Gill-1933



Arthur and Henrietta Goodrich-1927



## SULLIVAN FARMHOUSE

Nestled in the green corn fields of Ross Township about three miles southeast of Merrillville just off U.S. 30 stands the Sullivan ancestral home. The history of this dwelling begins with the man who built it, Patrick Sullivan. Born in the highlands of County Down, Ireland, he came to this country in 1850 as a young man hoping to find a more promising future in the "Land of Plenty." When he left his native country, Ireland was deep in the throes of a famine pursuant to a potato crop failure the preceding year and aggravated by the country's seemingly incessant warfare.

Patrick settled in Hobart, Indiana, where he met, wooed, and won the hand of Sarah Fowler, who also hailed from the "Auld Sod" and had come here from Ireland with her brother, Ted, in 1853.

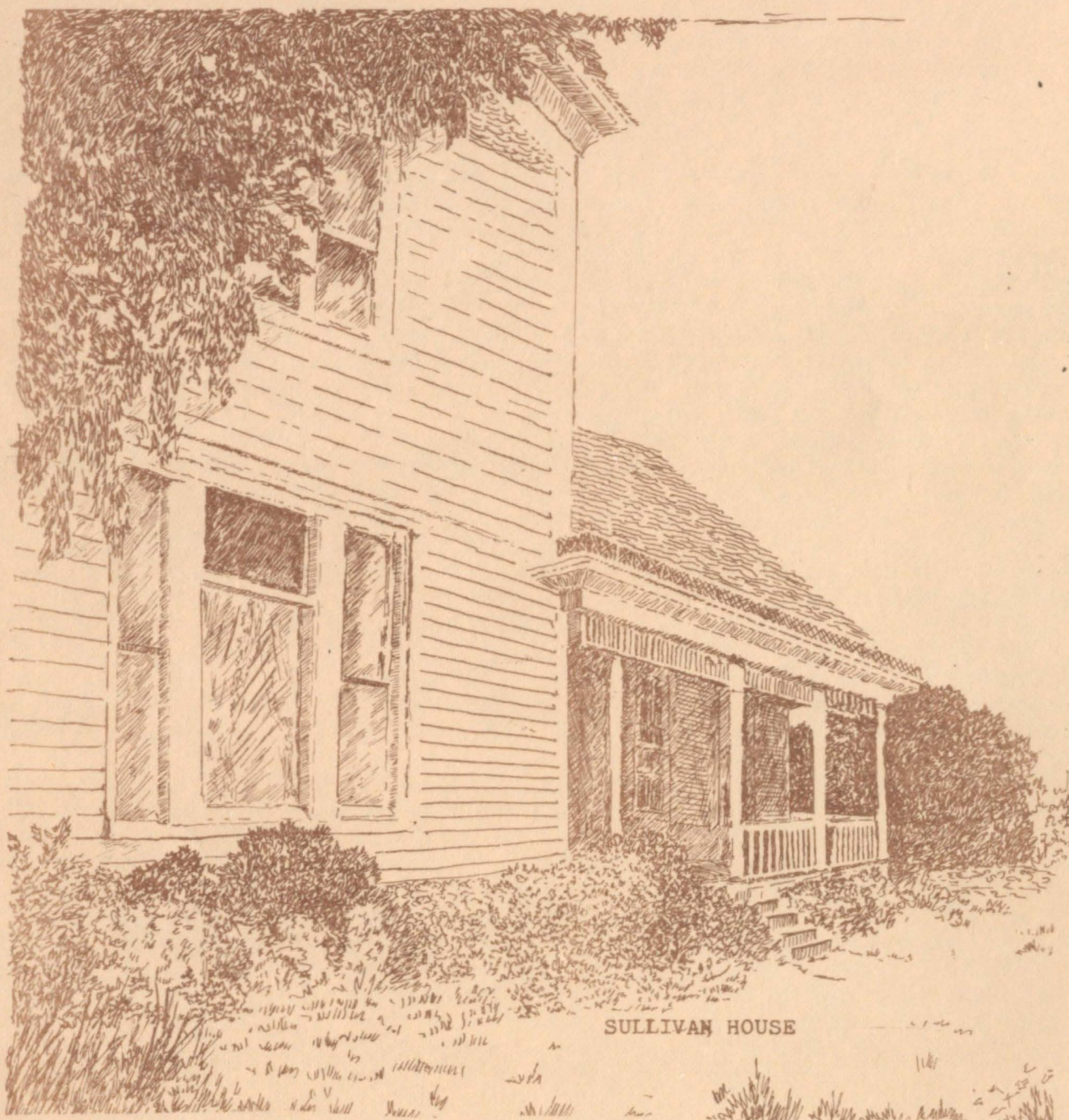
There is a huge gap in our knowledge of their activities after their marriage in Hobart. It is known that they resided in La Grange County for a time. In 1896, Patrick, Sarah, their three children and Sarah's brother, Ted, moved to Ross Township. Patrick purchased one hundred acres from Mr. Vincent on which he erected the home pictured here. The two-story frame house, which faces 83rd Avenue, while not overly large, is quite comfortable and compared to the small house already on the property which it replaced, it must have seemed quite a mansion. The living accommodations consisted of a good size parlor, combination kitchen and dining room (heated by the iron cookstove), one bedroom on the ground floor, and two low chamber bedrooms off a narrow hallway on the second floor.

As time passed, Patrick purchased more land, eventually accumulating 138 acres. Most of the farming, however, was carried out by son Thomas as Patrick was suffering from failing health and had lost the sight in one eye as a result of an injury incurred at Gettysburg in the Civil War. Finally Thomas assumed all the duties of the operation of the farm and Patrick was free to enjoy a well deserved retirement. Both Patrick and Sarah stayed on the farm til their deaths.

The Sullivan House was occupied by four successive generations of the family over more than sixty years. Thomas Sullivan's children were born and reared there, and upon his death in 1935, the land was divided among the six offspring, son Edward and his brother Arthur inheriting the house along with their portion of acreage. Edward bought out his brother and lived in the house until 1956, at which time he sold the building to Howard Ewen. The Sullivan holdings had been earlier reduced when the Government bought a portion of the land in 1937 when Highway 30 was being built.



Though much of the old farm has passed out of the family, part of it is still owned by descendants of the Sullivan clan. Thomas Sullivan's daughter Grace and husband George Gill, gave land to each of their three sons, George, Terry, and Bob, who built their homes, one beside the other, across from the old homestead. George, a veritable artist in his field, is the printer of this book. He is married to Shirley Ann Kretz and they are the proud parents of nine children (Roger, Lisa, Brian, Phillip, Kevin, Karen, Allen, Norman, and Matthew) some of whom conjure up images of leprechauns with their big eyed looks, red hair and freckles, and infectious grins that brim with mischief. Though they don't carry the Sullivan name, the trace of County Down is unmistakable.







Elizabeth (Grimmer) Weis



John A. Weis Jr.



## WEIS HOMESTEAD

Among the pioneer dwellings still standing in Ross Township, the Weis home is one of the few still owned by a descendant of the builder. The house, located on the southeast side of Madison Street near US 30, was constructed about 1869.

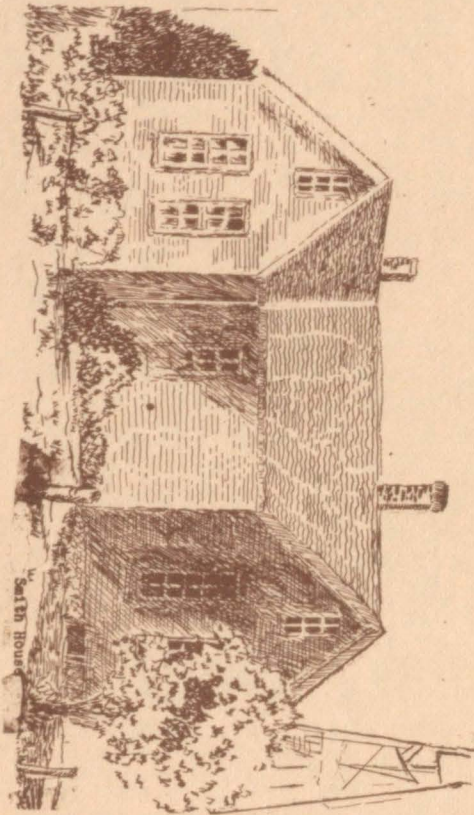
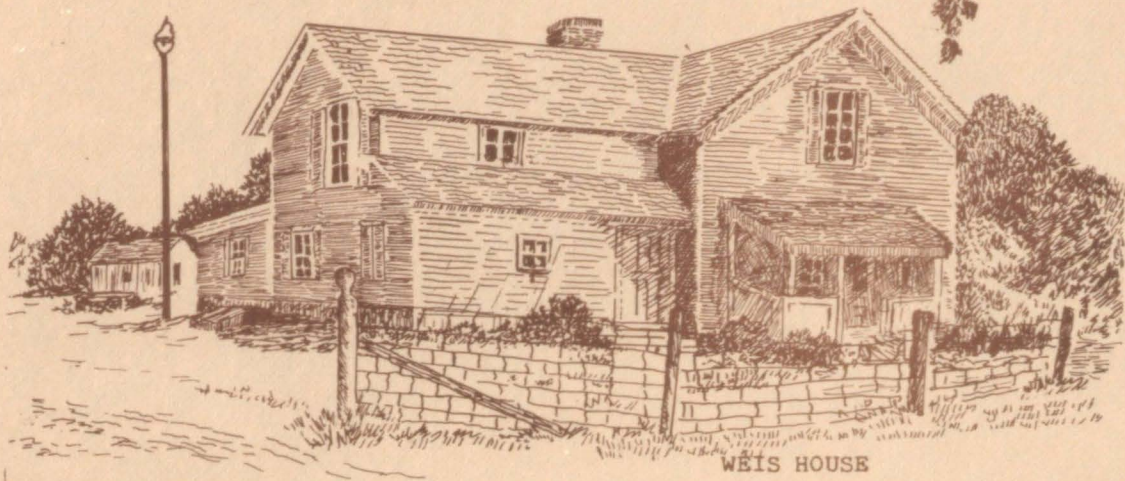
The builder of the house was John Weis, who came with his parents to Lake County, Indiana, from Germany in 1847. The family settled in St. John, Indiana, where John was reared to handle the responsibilities of farm life. After his marriage to Elizabeth Grimmer, he purchased a large farm in Ross Township upon which he built the present dwelling. There his eleven children were born, and there he lived until his death.

His son Mathias, born in 1886, and reared on the farm, married Theresa Klein of St. John and had moved to Chicago Heights, Illinois. After his mother died, Mathias moved his family to his childhood home. The last two of his ten children were born on the farm. In 1909, due to his ill health, he moved his family to Texas and sold the farm to his sister, Mary Weis. She had married John Gartner and the couple was living in Hammond, Indiana, where they operated a saloon for several years. After her brother Mathias left for Texas the Gartners returned to Merrillville, bought the farm and worked it until John Gartner retired, at which time they returned to Hammond. Their son, Leo Gartner and his wife, Cora (Waltz) Gartner, occupied the house until they built their new brick home adjacent to the old farmhouse, leaving the care of the house to a relative of Cora, who currently occupies it.

The Weis dwelling is a typical example of farmhouses built near the end of the century. It is two stories high and built of clapboard siding with a gabled roof and small porch set in the angle. The structure remains the same today except for a few minor changes. The front porch has been closed in and asbestos siding now covers the frame structure. Still standing alongside the house is an old bell which was used for many years to inform the family of dinner, the arrival of visitors, and impending danger.

The old homestead has seen the round of marriages, births, and death in the Weis family. No one knows what the future has in store for the house. There are three young great-grandchildren who still live in Merrillville...maybe one of them will take a turn at maintaining the ancestral home.







## MATHIAS SMITH HOMESTEAD

When Ross Township was still a wilderness, heavy with timber, swamps, and wild game, Mathias Smith, a native of Germany, settled in this area. With the help of his sons, he cleared the land and built his home where he would reside his entire life. The house, built in 1845, and of simple construction, was merely a one-story frame dwelling with a gable roof, clapboard siding, front and rear doors and long narrow windows, and a small side porch. In later years he built on the side addition, which made separate living quarters, for his son John and wife Anna, who ran the farm.

Mathias was not an enthusiastic tiller of the soil and left the bulk of farm management to his two sons. An educated man, Mathias was more interested in public affairs. Moreover he enjoyed surveying and became one of the first surveyors in Lake County. He also has the distinction of being the first to delineate the boundaries of Burns Ditch.

After Mathias' death in 1887, his sons and their families took turns living in the house. Tony and Margaret (Hoffman) Smith occupied the house from 1914 to 1921, then turned it over to brother John. When the house outlived its usefulness for John, Tony sold the building to John A. Gross, who in turn sold it to Dwight Kender, and Tony paid rent on the house so that his brother Willie could live there.

After a land subdivision and reorganization, Jacob Smith bought the homestead and had it relocated just east of Broadway, where he rented it out to one Joseph Elbert. Joseph, a bachelor, had been a mischievous youngster and never had outgrown his adventurous ways. It was during Prohibition that Joseph lived in the Smith House, a time when the Volstead Act was inspiring some of our now ambitious citizenry to distill their own spirits. Joseph operated a still in the house behind closed doors and shaded windows. Unfortunately his "moonshine" making operation resulted in disaster as the century old house with its dry timber exacerbated by the presence of the highly flammable brew produced a roaring conflagration that rapidly reduced the home to ashes.

## UNDERWOOD HOUSE

The old Underwood House is located on 73rd Avenue next to the Town Hall. The home stands shabby and discolored and desolate, practically begging someone to restore it to its former charm. At the present time it is the property of the town and no decision had been made as to its future.



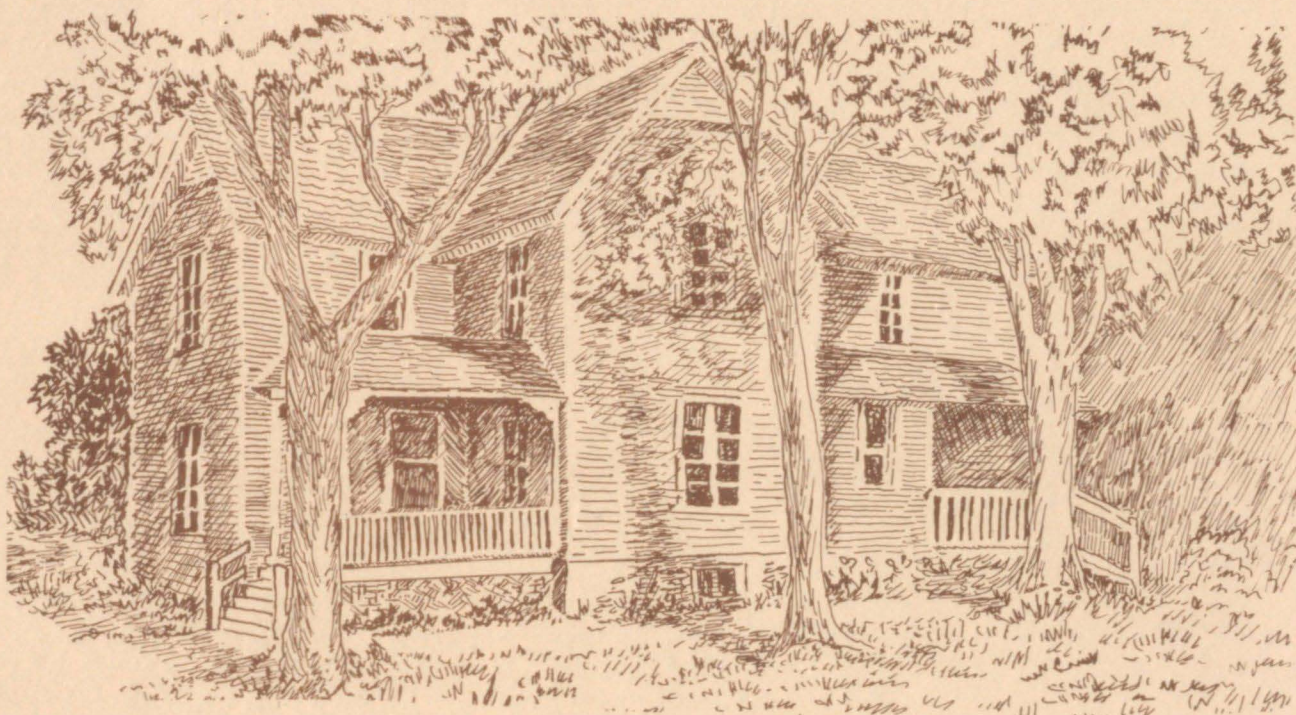
The large, two-story dwelling with its twin porches on the west side (one in front and one in back) was built by Winfield Scot Burge circa 1880. It served as a home for him, his wife, Mary Jane (Demmon) and ten children until they relocated to a farm which Mary Jane had inherited from her father, Julius Demmon.

Around 1900, Frank, Clara, and Jessie Underwood, sisters and brother, moved into the house. It is not known whether they owned or rented the building but they occupied it for so many years that the house became known by their name.

Jessie moved out following her marriage to Bertram Saxton. Clara, who never married, remained with her brother Frank, a confirmed bachelor who startled the entire community when at the age of sixty he took Nettie Macy as his bride.

Over the years the house has been owned or rented by several families. Its location near the Old Primary Building (the present town hall) has led to interactions between the occupants and the school children. One little girl, who intensely disliked the taste of the school's drinking water, arranged a trade whereby she could get all the water she desired from the Underwood House (which was supplied by a different well than was the school) in exchange for eggs she found in nests behind the school.

The fate of the Underwood House is not certain; however it could become a useful public building, or home, or it could be completely obliterated. Many eighteenth century houses are threatened today because we tend to view them in the name of progress rather than in a historical sense. Hopefully, this partial record of Merrillville's early homes and families will inspire us to restore many of these historical monuments.







Winfield Scot and Mary Jane (Demmon) Burge and seven of their ten children. Arthur, Mary, Lula, Ralph, Clara, Bertha, and Elizabeth.



Catherine & Barbara  
Berens-twins



## THE OLD BERENS HOUSE

It is popularly believed that pioneer families quickly threw together one room log cabins upon their arrival to shelter them until such time as they could build a home more to their liking. The old Berens house is representative of another species of interim housing used by many early settlers. This form was a three room structure, one room under the rafters, and a kitchen and bedroom, separated by a hall, on the main floor.

Peter Schillo built this house in 1845, two years after he arrived here from Germany, on land he obtained from the government for \$1.87 an acre. The fact that the cabin had two sleeping rooms was convenient when company came from out of town because Peter could segregate the men and women's sleeping quarters.

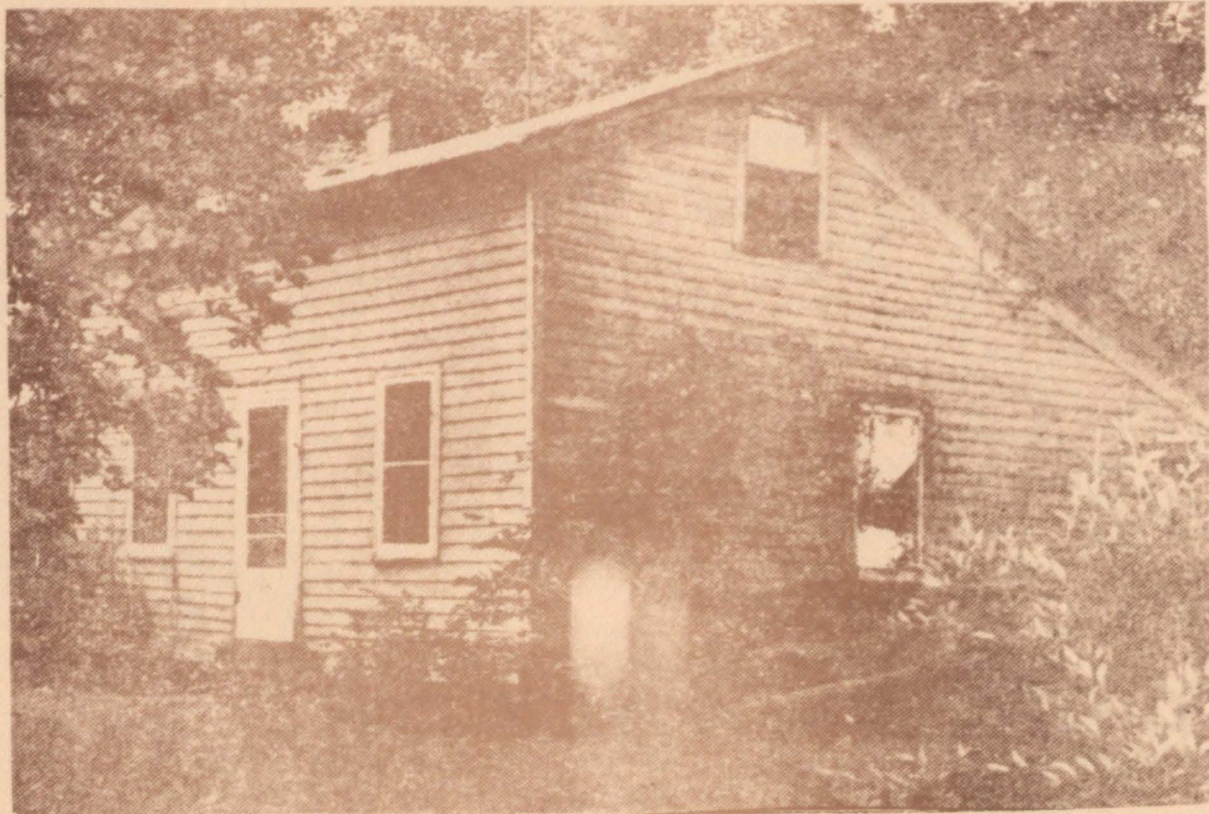
Over the years Peter acquired more land and eventually was able to part with the house and the acreage. Peter sold the property to fellow countryman August Niksch, who remained there with his family until 1863. The beginning of the Civil War afforded August the opportunity to acquire enough money to buy a larger farm. It was customary at that time for the affluent to hire surrogates to take their sons' places on the field of battle. By going to war in someone's stead as a member of the Indiana Volunteers Company, August earned \$300 with which he purchased a forty acre spread located on 73rd Avenue near Broadway.

After August sold the Schillo farm, the property changed hands many times before John Berens, yet another German immigrant, came into possession. The land, and the accompanying two houses, were sold to Berens in 1883 for \$475. (The origin of the second house is unknown. It is pure conjecture to suggest that August Niksch may have added it as his family grew). John had brought his family, wife Anna, daughter Mary, and son John, to Ross Township in 1880. Later twin daughters, Catherine and Barbara, were born to the Berens while they were residing on the former Schillo homestead. John, who operated a grist mill in Merrillville and peddled meat throughout the area, also ran a cider press next to his house.

After John's death in 1908, Mary married widower Peter Schneider and the couple lived in the house many years.

Around 1925, Mathias Lennertz purchased the house and land to be used for rental purposes, and in that capacity, the structure sheltered many Merrillville residents throughout the years. The last occupants were Leroy and Neva Wadman. In 1956, the building suffered an ignominious demise when the fire department was forced to burn it, as the old house could no longer withstand the strain of time.





Berens House



Berens Family

Mary, John Jr.,  
Anna and John,  
Catherine and  
Barbara



## MELLON PIONEER HOME

Just one mile east of Broadway on 54th Avenue, across from the old Catholic Cemetery, is a large open field where once stood the pioneer home of the Mellon family.

Dennis Mellon, the builder of the vanished dwelling, was born in County Down, Ireland in 1802, at a time when the country was growing rapidly. By the time he was of age, Ireland was so overpopulated and food so scarce that thousands of Irish people poured out of the country, many of them making their way to America. Dennis Mellon and his family were among the droves who tearfully but bravely left the homeland that could not support them, in 1834, hoping to find peace and security in a new land. Settling first in Buffalo, New York, where another child was born, the family later relocated in Ross Township in 1842.

Dennis purchased a large tract of land that same year on which he erected his two-story frame clapboard home. Like most early pioneers, he used the materials which were available in the immediate vicinity. Various sized field rocks were laboriously brought up from the fields by the Mellon family to be used to build a fireplace. The larger boulders were utilized as corner stones under the house and a large flat stone served as a front step. When all was said and done, the Mellons had a six room residence supplemented by a lean-to that did double duty as a wash house and as an area for canning and storing.

The Mellon family was devoutly Catholic and lent their efforts to furthering the causes of the Church. In fact, in 1850, Dennis generously donated four acres of land to the Catholic Church for the purpose of building a church and cemetery. Before the log cabin church was built, services were held in various homes in the community, the Mellon home being one of them. Each Sunday Mrs. Mellon would make her house ready for the Sunday services by scrubbing the wide floor boards, washing windows till they sparkled, and polishing the heavy furniture until it shone. The downstairs bedroom was made ready for the circuit bishop, Right Reverend Maurice de St. Palaise, by heating the room with a bucket of hot coals.

The congregation came from all areas of Lake County, some from as far as Hammond, Indiana. Mrs. Mellon was honored to have the Bishop serve Mass in her home, but she dreaded the aftermath in rainy seasons. Roads were muddy and much of it was tracked into her home. Consequently many Sunday afternoons were spent scooping the mud out with a shovel. After the log cabin church was built, Mrs. Mellon, good Christian that she was, continued to help clean up after Sunday Mass.

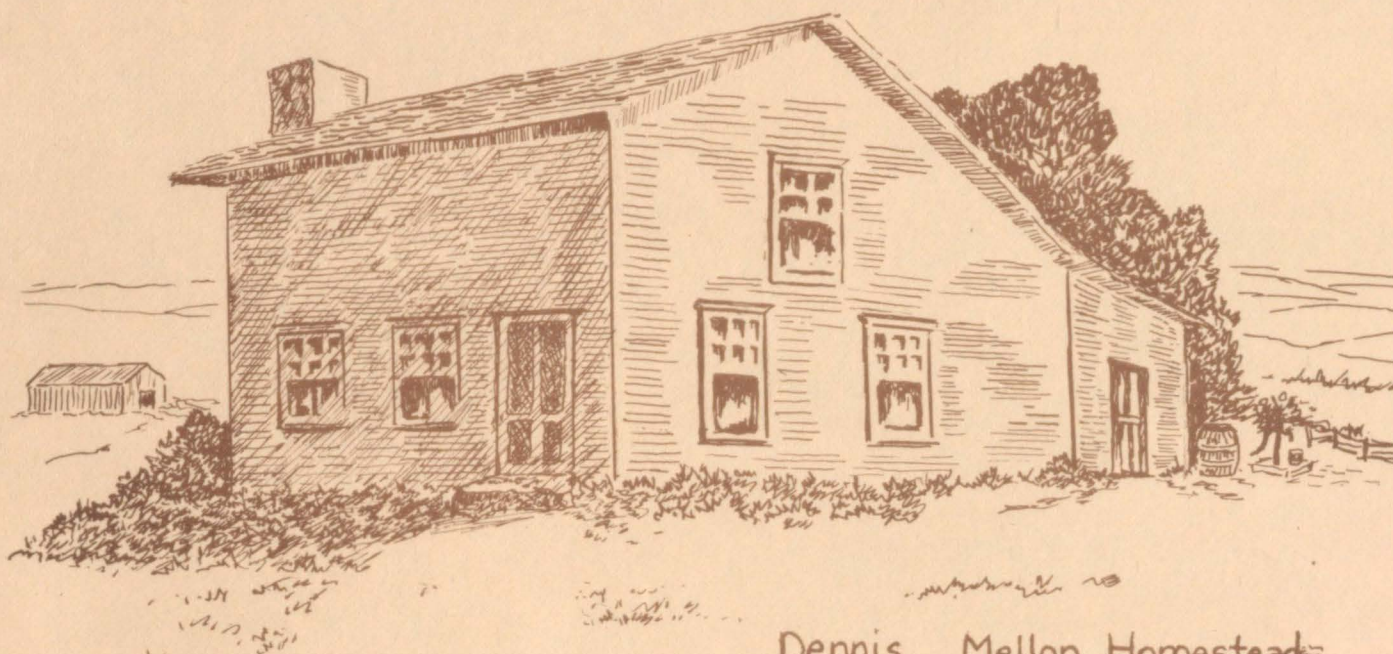
In memory of Frank H. and Amelia Krieter Halfman  
By Margaret and Helen Halfman



To son John Mellon fell the task of keeping a ready supply of fuel for the fireplace. Clever John, who intensely disliked chopping wood, devised a method to eliminate the dreaded chore. His solution was to cut a hole in a wall of the house and shove an uncut tree into the opening and onto the fire. The end that was not in the fire was hooked to the ceiling with a long rope to allow lowering of the tree into the hearth as the opposite end was consumed.

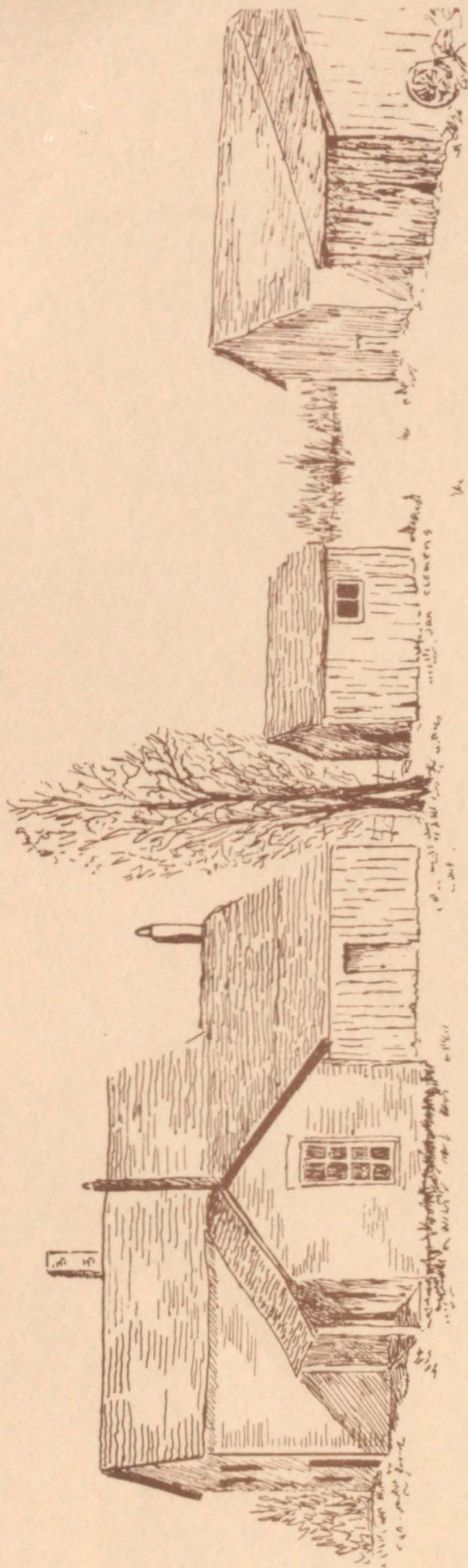
When Dennis Mellon died in 1862, John and his family took over the house and stayed there many years. They were succeeded by Frank Halfman, grandson of Dennis Mellon, who lived there until 1900...long enough to see many of his fifteen children born in the old homestead.

Frank rented out the home until 1915. At that time, he gave possession to his son John Halfman and John's wife Clara. During their residence, two children were born to them. In 1930, John and Clara moved to another house on the same property, leaving the home of John's forefathers vacant. There were to be no more renters or owners. The only occupants were a few chickens who found a good roosting spot on the old fireplace. Eventually the building had to be torn down. The removal of the house allowed the weeds and wild vegetation to reclaim the plot of land so that the site of the Mellon ancestral home was once again open field. John Halfman sold the land to Finerty Real Estate and the acreage has been subdivided.



Dennis Mellon Homestead





Harms - Niksch Farm

## Harms-Niksches Farm

The Harms-Niksches farm was located on East 73rd Avenue across the road from the Deep River School. Edward Niksch, son of German immigrants, married Tillie Harms of Merrillville and assumed the operation of her family's farm. Ed also worked for a time in brick yards in Hobart, and drove the school bus for Ross Township. Edward and Tillie had four children: Leona, (Mrs. Clifford Carpenter), Laverne (married Irene Martine,) Donald (married Ruth Nagel,) and Edward Jr. (married Leona Stevens.) See accompanying photos and illustration.





The Niksch family dressed up for a family outing in 1929. Clockwise from Leona (sitting on the bumper,) are pictured Lavern, Tillie, Edward Jr., Edward Sr., and Donald.

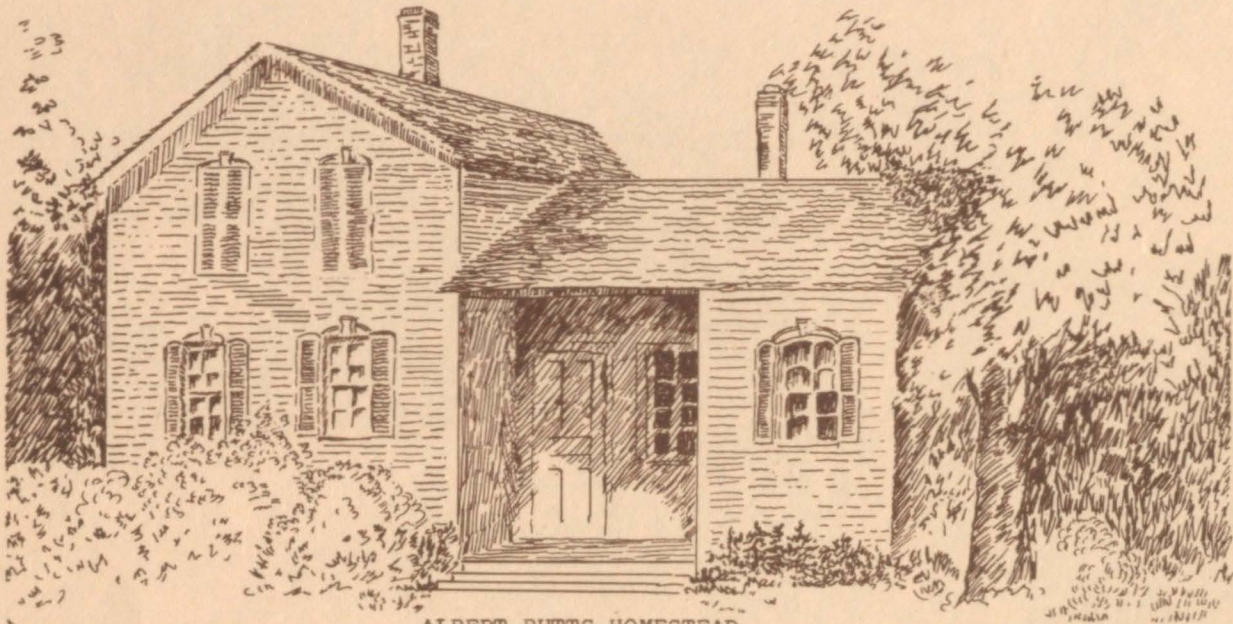


Ruth and Donald  
Niksch  
1944



## ALBERT BUTTS HOMESTEAD

Albert Butts and Almira Demmon Butts came to this area from Vermont in 1837 in the company of Almira's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Demmon, and four of her siblings, including her brother, Julius, who started a veritable dynasty of Demmons in this area. Albert and Almira settled on a claim a few miles west of Merrillville, where they built the illustrated house circa 1845. The house was torn down in the mid 1950's. Many of the Butts descendants still reside in the area.

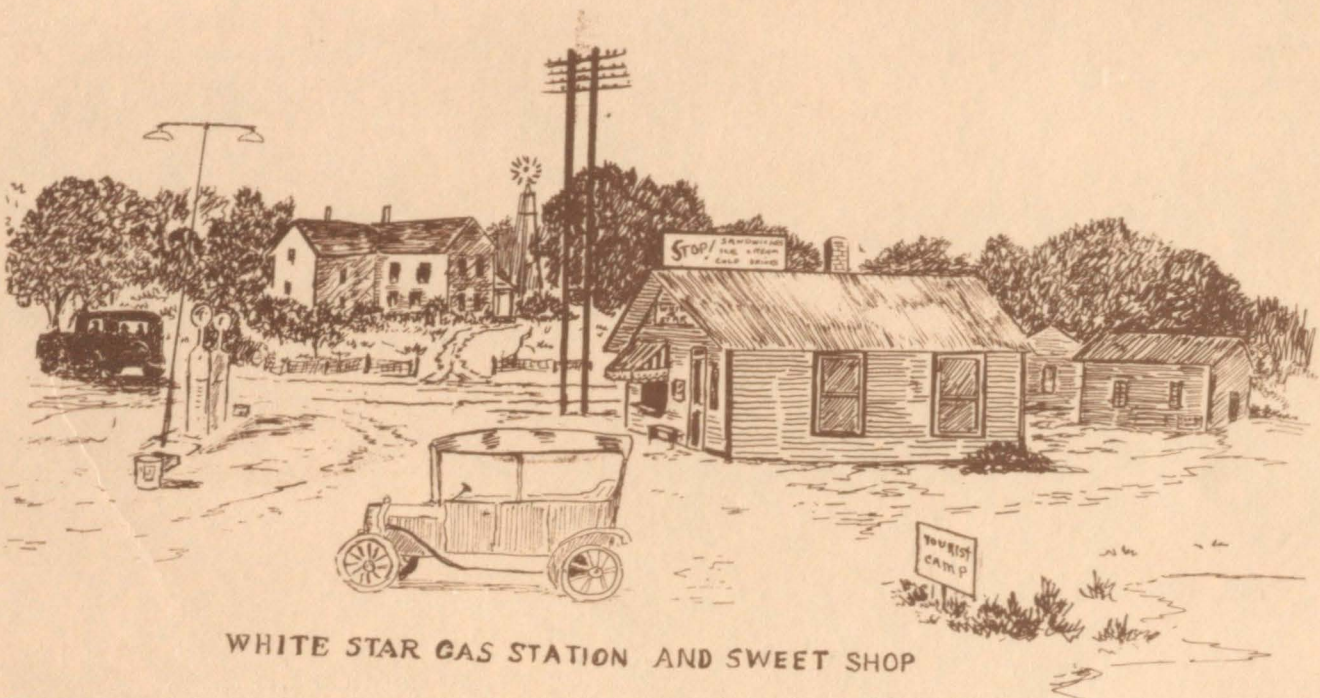


ALBERT BUTTS HOMESTEAD



## WHITE STAR GAS STATION

The White Star Gas Station was the local hangout particularly popular in the 1930's. It was run by Edward Koch and his wife, Francis (Franz) Koch (Frances was also known as Maude or Mom) for a decade after which time Edward's brother, Clarence, managed it. The facilities included a dance floor and live entertainment, featuring the Bisselberg Boys guitar playing, a restaurant, and cabins out back for the travel worn. The Friday night fish fry was very well attended. A home belonging to a Demmons descendant can be seen in the background of the illustration.



WHITE STAR GAS STATION AND SWEET SHOP



## SHOUP HOUSE

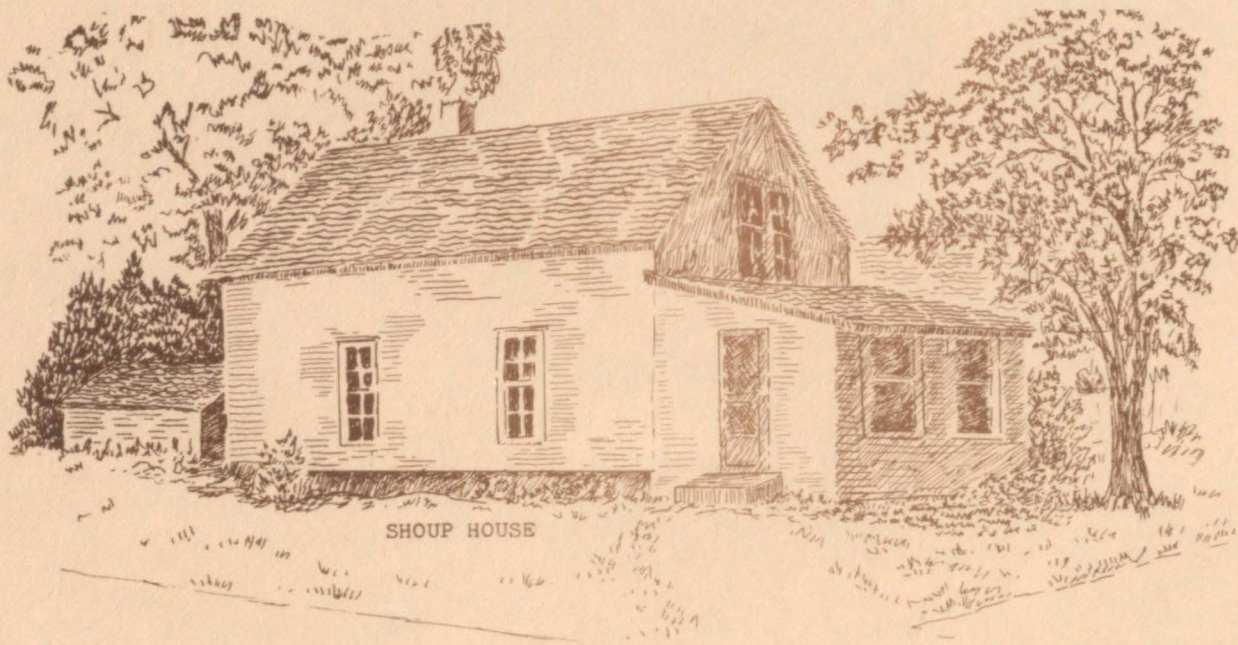
Originally known as the Vaness House (the authors have not completed the research on this family), this tiny antiquated cottage was constructed circa 1870. The story and a half, four room dwelling is rumored to be a log cabin under its modern siding. The house has known many renters over the years, but is currently owned by the Shoup family and is occupied by Mrs. Estella Shoup.

Arthur Shoup, a carpenter who came from Porter County, wed Clara Blance Bothwell, the descendant of an area pioneer family. She was the daughter of Ransom and Geneva (Bahr) Bothwell of Ross Township, and Ransom was the son of John and Nancy (Dutton) Bothwell, who had come to this area in 1839.

Arthur, Clara, and children lived in the Clifford Pierce home for a time and later moved into the small cabin. While they resided there and the children were very young, Clara died at age thirty-five. The older girls rose to the occasion and abandoned their studies to tend to the house and take what jobs they could find. Daughter Neva, for instance, found employment in Demmons' Sweet Shop as a 'soda jerk', and also she and sister Vera worked for a time in Stoltz's store. The Shoup children are all grown now and it could hardly be said that their early exposure to life's responsibilities hampered their development in any way.

Arthur's second wife, Estella, lives alone in the house which, save for the addition of siding and the porch enclosed, has known no changes over the years, not even the addition of indoor plumbing. Mrs. Shoup lives quite contentedly without the assistance of modern conveniences. To some she may seem a bit anachronistic. To others she may seem stubbornly old fashioned, as one who refuses to give up the security of old ways for "newfangled" modernities. There is yet a third way to see her seeming refusal to change with the times and that is that she is a vanishing breed, preserving a lifestyle that is near extinction.





Arthur and Clara (Bothwell) Shoup



## BOYD HOMESTEAD

The Boyds' history in this area can be traced to the arrival of Elizabeth Kelly Boyd and her twin sons, Eli and Levi, and daughter Sara, in Ross Township in 1848. Elizabeth, a native of Pennsylvania, had married Alex Boyd and the couple made their home in Lucas County, Ohio, where the twins were born. Alex died in 1844 leaving Elizabeth to rear the children alone, a situation she remedied by marrying one Marmaduke Bunting. The family then took up residence on a farm north of I-65 on 73rd, living in a log cabin until they were able to build a more comfortable home.

Records show that when the Civil War broke out, Levi Boyd lent his services to the cause. He was part of the Ninety-ninth Regiment Infantry, Indiana Volunteers, Company A. His compatriots included John and George Merrill, the Pierce Brothers and good friend Hiram Barton. In the fall of 1864 Levi suffered a wound that was to cause him serious back trouble the rest of his life.

Eli married Agnes Hyde in 1874. Levi never married and made his home with Eli and Agnes and their five children, Alex, Warren, Charles, Alice and George. Short, slim Levi was a welcome addition to the household with his funloving ways and kidding nature. He lavished attention on his niece and nephews and provided the perfect contrast for stern, serious Eli, whose very physical presence..tall, thin, high cheek boned..bespoke his no nonsense personality.

In their lifetime Eli and Levi accrued about one thousand acres, which upon their deaths (Eli in 1911 and Levi in 1918) was distributed among Eli's children. George was given the old farm and house. George, a graduate of Northern College in Valparaiso, Indiana, in addition to farming three hundred acres found time to teach at Hurlburt Corners School. He also served on the School Advisory Board under Trustees Henry Seifert, Emil Buchfuchrer, and Henry Fieler.

George married Addie Guernsey, daughter of Joe Guernsey of Ross Township. Beautiful Addie with her fine delicate features and wide expressive eyes was considered quite a catch. Her fashion tastes enhanced her classic looks, and her regal poise and bearing impressed everyone. As Mrs. Walters said, "She stepped out of her surrey dressed like a princess--so neat and dignified."

Lest we think Addie's life was one of dressing up and "holding court", it should be pointed out that Addie was an energetic, hardworking woman, quite capable of meeting the demands of being the wife of a prosperous farmer. The large farm required the efforts of several men and women to keep it running smoothly, so George imported help from Chicago through an employment agency. Having hired help around meant more cleaning and cooking for Addie, as the Boyds fed and housed their workers. It was not uncommon to see fourteen to twenty



men sitting down to dinner in the Boyd home. Organizing, preparing and cleaning up after such meals was no small task and Addie handled it efficiently as did her mother-in-law Agnes before her. Besides her contribution to the management of the farm, Addie, like George taught school for a time.

George and Addie were blessed with three children, Lucille, Ellen, and Lenore. Lenore married Harry Calpha and moved to Chicago, where she worked as a librarian and Harry taught journalism. During the twenty years the Calphas lived in the Windy City, they journeyed to Merrillville every weekend to visit George and Addie at the old farm. In 1960, they left the city and retired to the Boyd home.

Today small, slender Lenore Calpha, with her husband Harry, are living in the seventeen room Boyd mansion surrounded by mementoes of her ancestors. She is an enthusiastic, exuberant woman who fondly reminisces about the simple childhood joys of scrambling up the backstairs and then sliding down the front staircase, or about the thrill of learning to drive the 1911 family Ford at the age of twelve.

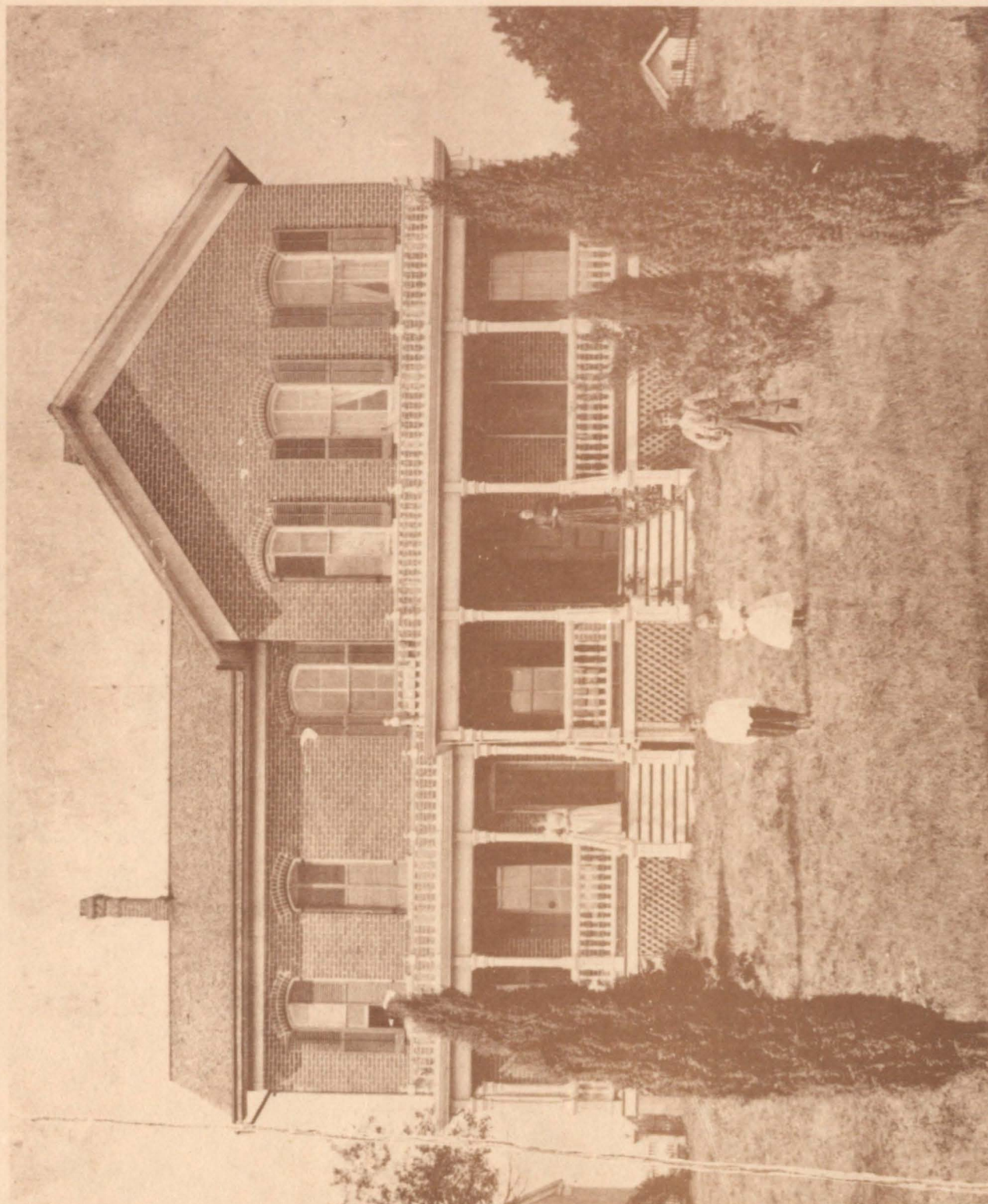
The original Boyd home remains today nearly intact except for a few changes including a modification in the porches leading to two front entrances. The original design of the house had a balustrade porch spanning the front of the house instead of the small one that the house features now.

The house, built in 1877, has an aura of solidity about it that seems to reflect the strength and character of its occupants. Like many of the houses of that time, it had front and back stairs and large rooms with high ceilings. Unlike other houses of the period, it had running water pumped in from the outside via windmill. Moreover, the Boyd house could lay claim to having the fanciest outhouse in these parts, boasting plastered walls, carpeting, spacious accommodations, and three holes !!!

The Boyd House is a veritable treasure chest of memories. Each room seems to breath stories of by-gone days. So little has been changed in recent years that with a little imagination one can visualize the three generations of Boyds, the twins Levi and Eli (and of course Agnus,) George and Addie and Lenore and Harry, who have all occupied the house over the last hundred years. All three generations have left their individual imprint on the house, yet there is a sense of permanence, solidity and timelessness that permeates the house in the roomy parlors with their fine old mirrors, portraits, chests, and furniture. It is these things that inform the visitor that here the personal items, which the owners loved and cared for, have been preserved in honor.



The house is still owned by the Boyd Sisters, Lucille Solman, Ellen Morris, and Lenore Calpha, who represent the fourth generation of Boyds in this area. Lucille and Ellen live in other towns.







REAR VIEW OF BOYD-SKINNER HOUSE

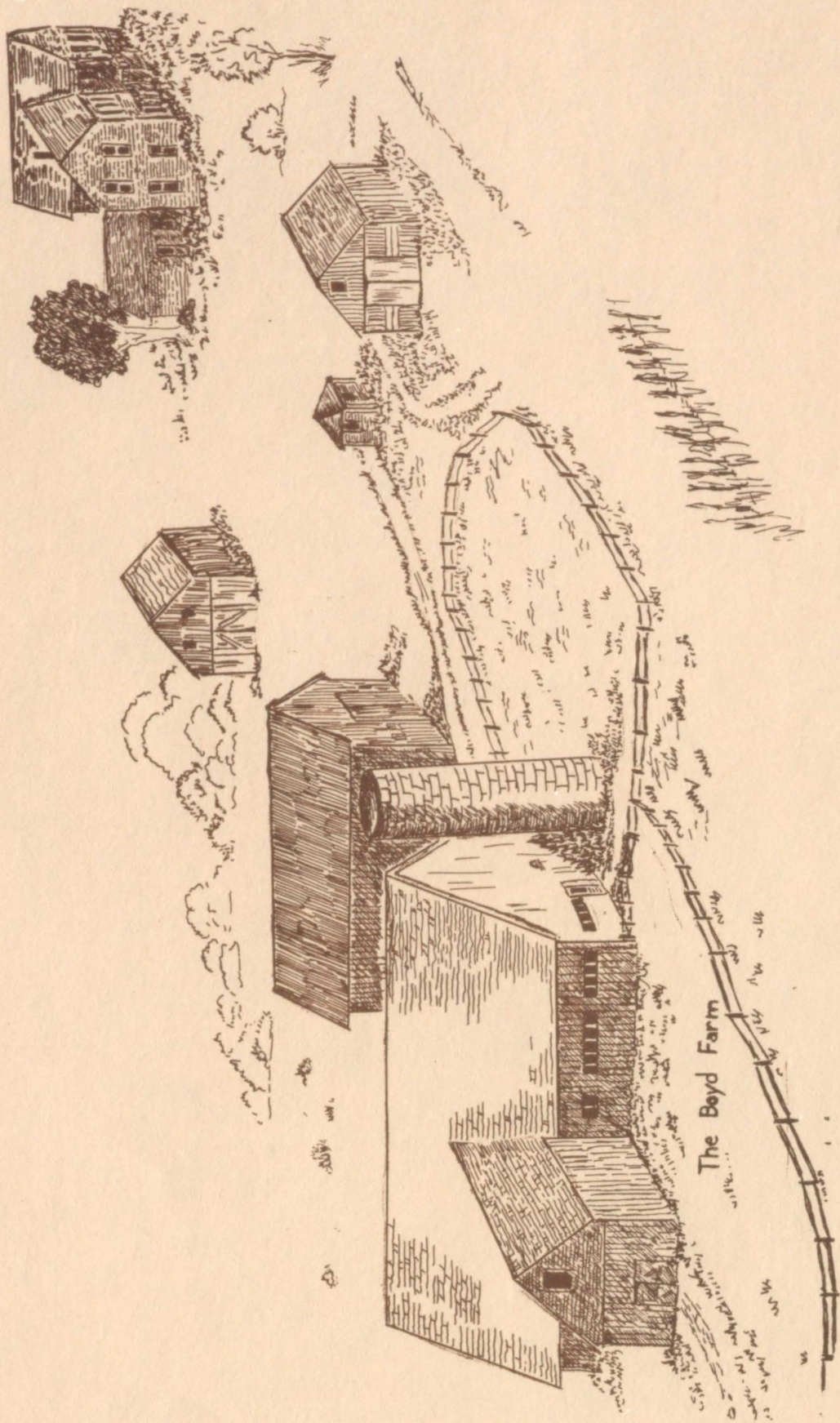


ADDIE (GUERNSEY) BOYD



GEORGE BOYD





The Boyd Farm





Warren and Elizabeth Boyd

Warren Boyd, son of Eli and Agnes (Hyde) Boyd, was born in 1885. He attended Valparaiso University and farmed acreage he inherited on North Mississippi Street, that was the former Perry Goodrich farm. He is pictured on his wedding day, April 18, 1904, with his new bride Elizabeth (Lizzee) Sauter, daughter of an Ainsworth pioneer family. His photo is true to life in that it reveals the quiet dignity that characterized him. He and Elizabeth were the parents of two sons, Elmer and Harold.

In memory of Warren Boyd  
Lucille (Boyd) Solman





Charles and Edna Boyd

Charles Boyd (known as Uncle Deck) was born in 1886. He had several occupations during his lifetime, including farmer, auto repairman, and school bus driver. The accompanying photo shows him with his wife, Edna Saxton, on the wedding day, April 2, 1907. Edna died in 1929, and Charles remarried in 1931. His second wife was Lydia Schuett Kraft, a widow with a daughter named Elizabeth Kraft, who died in 1954. Charles is remembered for his easy, outgoing manner, and for his hard work for the Republican Party, and for the Methodist Church for which he helped build the rear annex.

In memory of Charles Boyd  
By Lucille (Boyd) Solman





Alice (Boyd) Halsted

The demure young woman, in the accompanying photo, is Alice Boyd on her graduation day. At a later date, she became Mrs. Albert Halsted, and put her girlhood behind her, assuming the role of a prosperous farmer's wife.

Alice had an appreciation for the finer things in life, including music (she dearly loved to play the piano) and lovely clothes. Her trim figure was a dress maker's joy, and Alice had many of her fine garments handmade for her. Still others were purchased in Chicago. Lest we think her penchant, for pretty clothes excluded her from hard work, it should be mentioned that she cooked for many hired hands on their farm on East 73rd Avenue, and cleaned her home, and cared for her daughter, Jean.

Jean was a devoted daughter to the mother she regarded so highly, and was a comfort during Alice's advanced years. Alice passed away November 20, 1974.

In loving memory of Alice Halsted  
By Jean Halsted



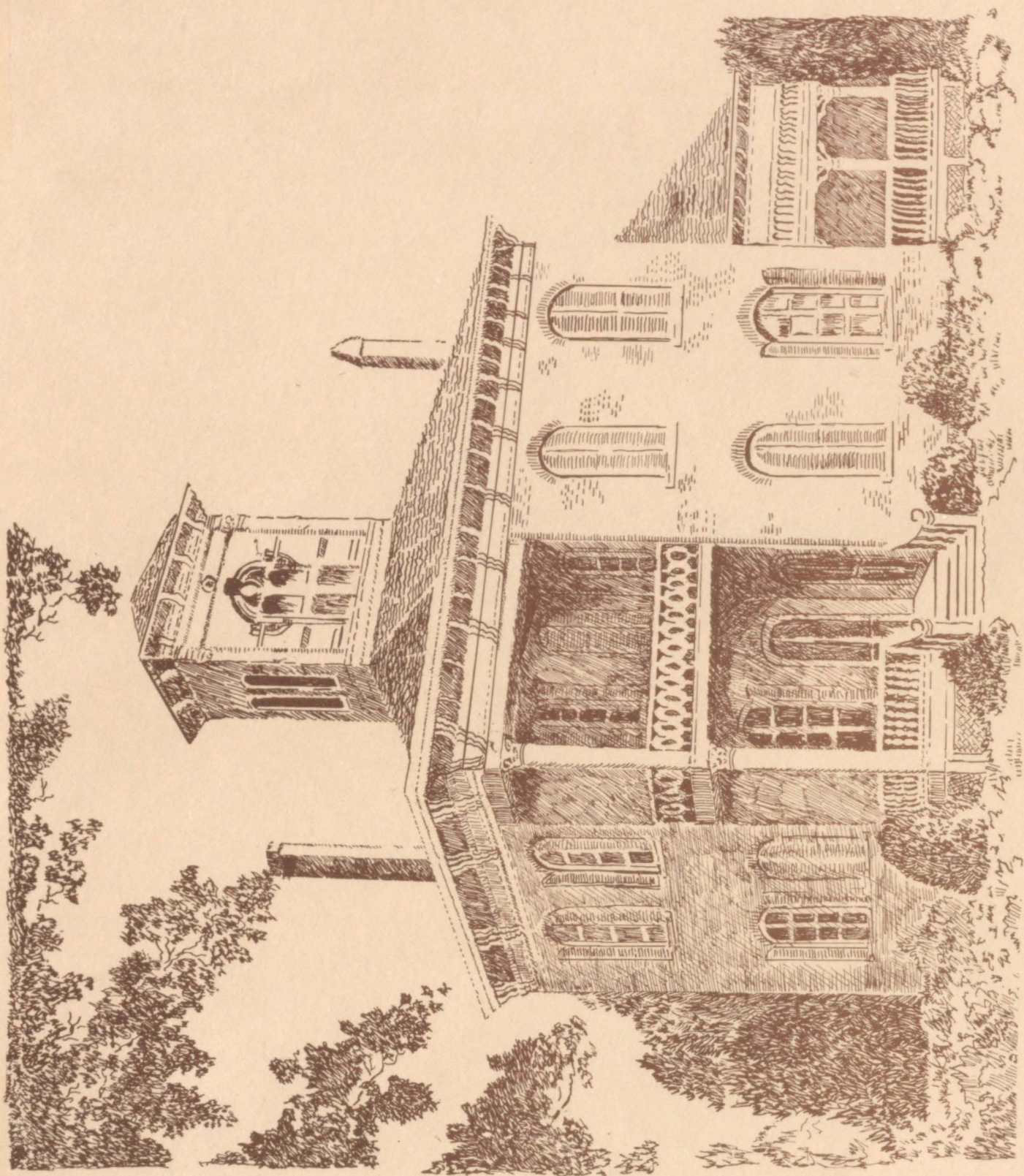
## BOYD-SKINNER HOUSE

It was on this property that the history of the town of Merrillville, Indiana, began. Jeremiah Wiggins, the first known pioneer to settle here, built a log cabin behind the present house, and the following year Ebenezer Saxton moved in and claimed the eighty acres. Jeremiah Wiggins disappears from the records. In 1877, a man named Morgan of Furnessville, bought the land from the descendants of the Saxtons and erected the present two-story, red brick dwelling. It was the most elaborately designed house in town. The ornate, Italianate architectural style features a cupola on the roof that confers a stately dignified quality to the dwelling. The house is pretty much unchanged save for the side addition which Eli Boyd constructed when he purchased the land in 1879. Since that time, the house has been in the Boyd family, although not in a direct line. Alex Boyd, son of Eli Boyd, inherited the estate in 1924. Alex (born in 1881) married Lee Flora, a teacher from Lockport, Indiana. Besides farming, Alex's career included a stint as trustee of Ross Township. The election preceding Alec's term of office is memorable for Alex's having won by a single vote. Sister Alice was employed by her brother as his secretary at a salary of \$100 per year. Alex, who is remembered as an intelligent, friendly man with a promising future, died in 1924, and, leaving no children, his wife became sole owner. She then married Olind Skinner, a college professor, whom she met while attending Indiana University. Lee Boyd Skinner died in 1943, leaving the historical house to Mr. Olind Skinner, who still owns and occupies the house.



John Elbert and one of the Chester boys threshing on the Boyd farm. (1914)







In memory of a dear mother  
Alice Halsted  
By Jean Halsted



Alice (Boyd) Halsted, born July 11, 1890, was the only daughter of Eli and Agnes Boyd. She wed Albert Halsted, son of another prominent pioneer family.



Alex Boyd



## THE PALMER HOUSE

Approximately three miles west of Merrillville, on a slope overlooking the Old Lincoln Highway, stands an old homestead house that is historically important because it was the home of Dr. Henry Palmer, the first licensed physician in Lake County, Indiana. The old Palmer home, though historically significant, has been so extensively remodeled and altered that little of its original architectural character remains. Among the modifications are the addition of brick asbestos siding, the simplification of the window styling, i.e. the round top windows are now square, the removal of the rear addition, and the absence of the outbuildings and windmill.

The illustration depicts the dwelling in its original state. The two-storied frame dwelling shelters a small attic beneath its gabled roof, and has a cellar of small storage stalls beneath the ground floor. The entrance on the lateral side of the house, which faces the road, had a small porch which today, larger in size, has been enclosed.

Henry Palmer was born, reared, and educated in New York. He studied medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons and graduated in 1832, after which time he was married to Harriet Cady, by whom he had two children. He practiced medicine for a time in Oneida Castle, New York, then in 1837 stories of the new frontier in the Midwest encouraged him to load his family into a wagon, and head for the open country. The long and tedious journey finally ended two miles west of the infant town of Wiggins Point. A tired family, a cracked wagon wheel, and the beauty of the area caused Dr. Palmer to choose Ross Township as his new home.

He soon established a large and lucrative practice. His rides to pioneer homes included Crown Point, St. John, Hobart, Lake Station, and sometimes Hammond. He was a friend of the poor as well as the wealthy, looking upon his position as a way of helping his fellow man rather than enriching himself. The early pioneers paid him for his services with grain, eggs, chickens, corn, and cheese. He was devoted to his practice, and had a high ideal of the duties and responsibilities of his profession. Failing health, in 1876, obliged him to put aside his stethoscope and retire from active practice.

Harriet Palmer had died in 1841, leaving the doctor with an infant daughter and a seven year old son. Through the years without his companion, hired help and neighbors assisted him in the care of the two small children. Then, in 1854, he married Katherine Underwood. She presented him with three



children, Hattie, Wilbur, and Alice; of the three children, only Alice married. She wed Christian Fieler, and they lived on a farm that encompassed land on which the present day Burger King is built. While they resided on this farm, their son, Henry, was born.

After Dr. Palmer's death, Katherine remained on the farm they had worked, and with hired help, managed to keep it going. Later on, she rented out the land while retaining the house for her own use. Still later, son-in-law Christian Fieler worked both his spread and the Palmer farm. Christian's son, Henry, followed him as manager of the farm, and Henry brought his wife Agnes (Severance) Fieler, to live on the Palmer farm. They oversaw operations there for many years, then moved out of his grandfather's old frame house into a modern brick home which is located on Palmer land off Route 30.

Henry has been very active in civic affairs. His years as trustee are held in such high regard, that the town honored him by naming a school for him, the Henry P. Fieler Elementary School. Moreover, Henry finds time for the Knights Templar, the Masons, and serves as president of the Ross Township Historical Society, which is sponsoring this publication, with a percentage of the proceeds to be used to help support the Deep River Mill Museum.

Henry and Agnes have five children, several of whom reside in the area: Henry Christian (Hobart), Alyce Lorraine Kaiser (Wanatah), Jayne Agnes Lukens (Elkhart), Robert George (Independence Hill), and Richard Arthur, who makes his home in Nottingham, New Hampshire.

Most of the Palmer and Fieler property has been subdivided and sold. However, Henry still retains possession of the Palmer House and one acre of the original tract.

Mr. and Mrs. Henry Fieler



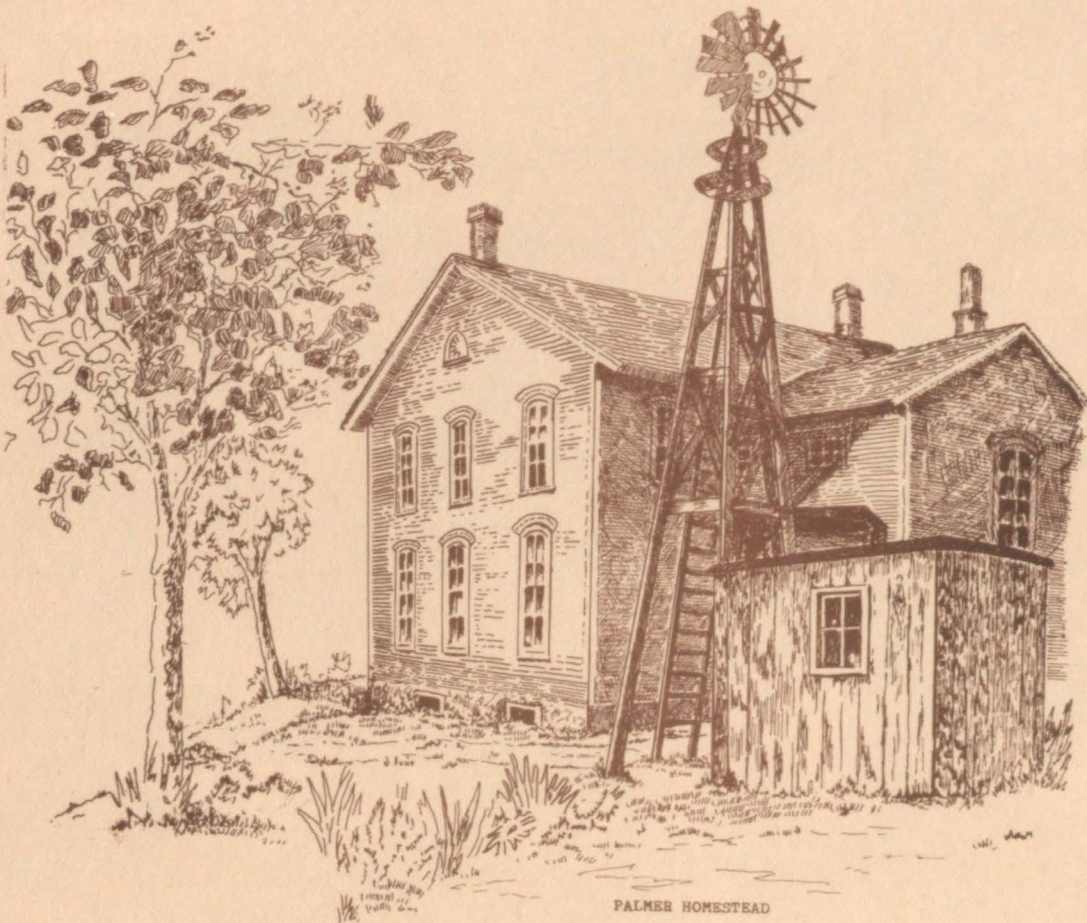


ALICE PALMER IN THE PALMER HOUSE



Hattie and Katherine (Underwood) Palmer





Dr. Henry Palmer



## CHARLES DEMMON FARM

The two-story, spacious frame house, built by Charles Demmon and Ella (Bay) Demmon, represents another link in a long chain of Demmon residences. This nine room house, built in 1875, was located on a former wagon path currently known as Cleveland Avenue. The structure, which was removed in 1972, was western in style with its rambling lateral wing and double porches.

Charles, son of Julius Demmon, was born in 1850, and was reared to farm life. When he got a spread of his own in the form of a gift of one hundred ten acres from his father, he applied himself to farming for some time until he turned his attention to butchering. Charles moved his family to Griffith, Indiana, where he worked at meat cutting for three years, and discovered that he missed farming more than he had anticipated. Charles then abandoned his new found career to return to his first love, working the land.

Charles and Ella were blessed by ten children, two sons and eight daughters. Lest anyone think that the couple would have done better to have a few more able-bodied sons to help with the chores, rest assured that the girls did their share of the farm work. Two of the Demmon children made Ross Township their home for all their lives, namely daughter, Lucille (Mrs. George Franz,) and son George (now deceased.) George's widow, Nellie (Guernsey) Demmon, lives on Catherine Street with her daughter, Ella Deppe.

The Demmon farm has long since been divided and parceled out. In fact, the Gary Country Club bought part of their land. The house is no more and the descendants are scattered.





## THE OLD MILL

This structure has the singular honor of being the oldest business building still standing in Merrillville, and its history is as rich as it is long. The Old Mill was erected in 1851 as a distillery. John and Elizabeth Law are reputed to have been the operators of the distillery which supplied liquor to many inns and saloons in Lake County.

In those days, Merrillville was widely known for the stills that abounded throughout the township and for the quality of the "spirited" liquid they produced. Some of our townsmen, being enthusiastic supporters of the various brews and their side effects, partook too frequently and in injudicious quantity of the intoxicating products available at the saloon and the mill, inviting the contempt of the more temperate residents of the town. Temperance Union members would peer disgustedly through nearly closed curtains at inebriated men who stumbled down the steps of the old saloon and staggered down the wooden sidewalk to their long suffering mates. Many a family endured the benumbing influence that alcohol had on the head of the household.

In 1854, the Mill became a respectable if less interesting addition to the community when it was changed over to of all things, a steam mill for grinding wheat into flour. After several years of operation, including some under the management of David and Candice Moore, the mill was closed down, only to be opened in the same capacity a few years later.

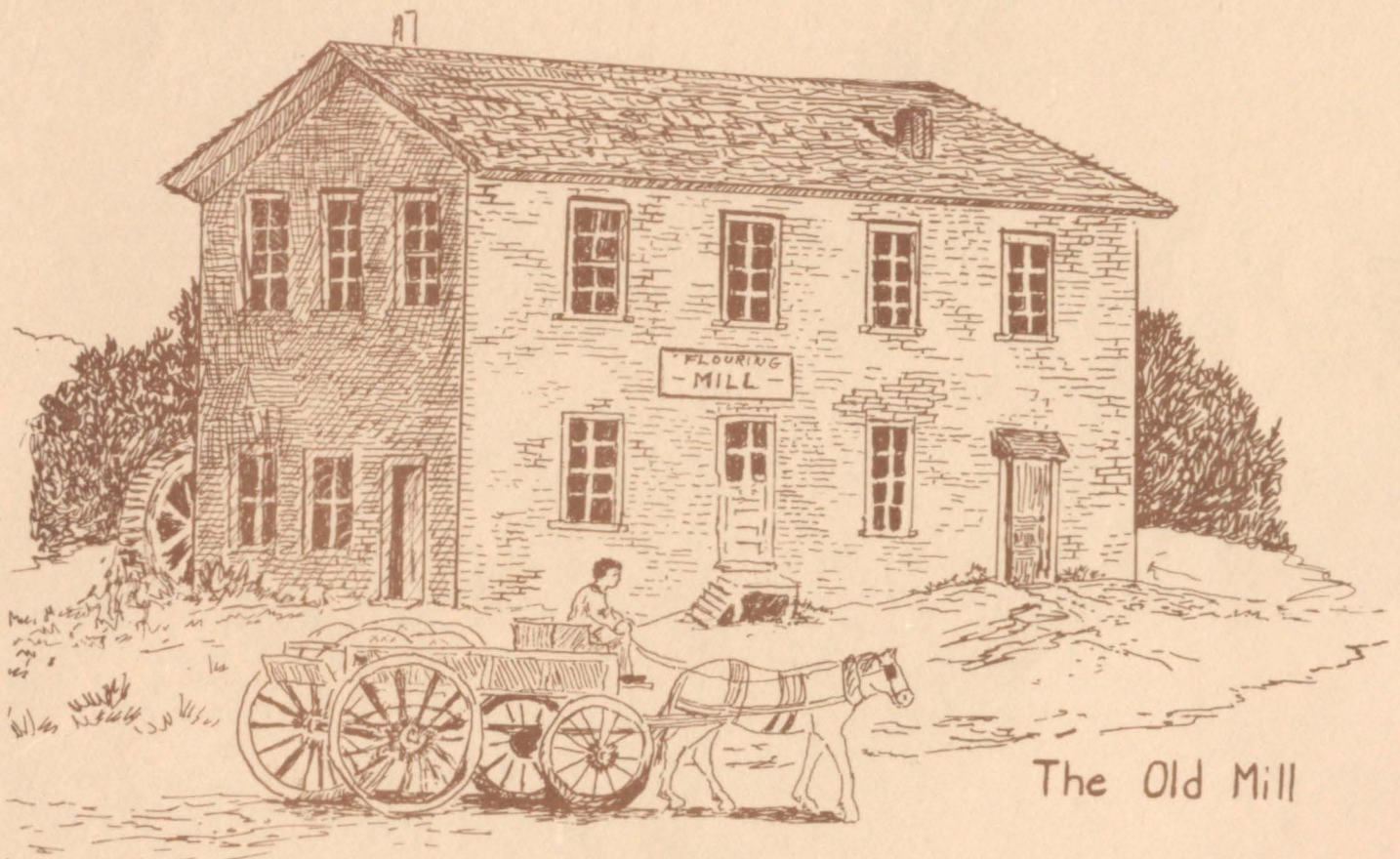
In 1884, John Berens, town miller of long standing, rented the mill and updated the operation by replacing the steam engine with a gas engine, the first to be used in Ross Township. Some years later, when John found it expedient to relocate, the mill underwent several changes of owners and changes of function. For a long period of time it was owned by J. and Harriet Tierney, who operated it as a tavern, restaurant, dance hall, and at one point, as a candy store. Under the Tierneys' management, the Mill became a real showplace and featured high caliber cuisine that attracted customers from all over. It was not uncommon for them to cater to large groups and professional organizations from Chicago. Their Friday fish dinners are particularly well remembered.

The mill reportedly was also used for a school when it wasn't milling or distilling or feeding the hungry. The mill was once again a restaurant when Tony and Sally Mazzaro ran it,



and is currently a pizzeria and tavern under the name of Roma's Restaurant and Cocktail Lounge, owned by Robert Barton, the Turkey Creek pharmacist, who had intended to use the building for his drug store.

Thus this mill has run the gamut of operations from candy store to tavern, gristmill to restaurant, and possibly to institution of learning. In recent months, the mill nearly had another use added to the roster as heavy spring rains swelled nearby Turkey Creek to uncomfortably high levels, threatening to render the mill some sort of bizarre watercraft.



The Old Mill



## THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

The first Catholic Mass in Merrillville (Turkey Creek), was offered in 1841 within the confines of a log cabin. The celebrant was a visiting priest who would periodically return to the settlement to conduct the services for the deprived and appreciative congregation. This situation is a far cry from the present state of affairs wherein several services are available on Sunday and a variety throughout the week as well. Four priests are available to tend to the spiritual needs of the community, and an imposing building provides a reverent setting for the celebration of various liturgical rites from daily mass to weddings, baptisms, and confirmations.

One hundred and thirty-five years ago these services were not performed with any kind of regularity and the occasions would be saved up, as it were, until the circuit bishop made his trimonthly (or maybe even semi annual or longer) appearance. These infrequent visits created some circumstances which at first glance might be cause for consternation. For instance, it was not uncommon for a couple to be wed without benefit of clergy, then upon the arrival of the priest, the union would be solemnized with a nuptial mass. Not too infrequently, the interval between visits was such that the date of the baptism of the couple's firstborn was entered in the church records before the date of the wedding.

For ten years various people volunteered their homes for the holding of services. In 1851, under the direction of Reverend B.J. Voors C.S.C., a frame building was constructed on the site of the present cemetery (the land donated by the Mellon family.) At this point in time, the settlement was still regarded as a mission, as such, and depended on visits from Holy Cross priests from Notre Dame. The first baptism was performed on John Adler, son of John and Margarita Plum Adler, on January 17, 1850. February 24, 1851, was the date of the first marriage in the church that celebrated the union of Sebastian Gasper and Margretha Muller. The first burial from S.S. Peter and Paul was George Hoffman on April 23, 1852. In 1858, the congregation had grown to the degree that a resident pastor was needed and Reverend Philip Wegemeyer assumed the role as head of St. John the Baptist Church, as it was called then. This church served communicants for miles in every direction, from Hobart to Liverpool to Lake Station to Tolleston to Lottaville (one of our former post office addresses).

Under the parish's second pastor, Reverend M. Paul Wehrle, a flagstone structure was erected in 1863 on the site that is the present day location of the church (5855 Harrison Street.)



The land was donated by Peter Fox and it would appear that the new name of the church, S.S. Peter and Paul Church, was also a tribute to the two men instrumental in its construction. The actual building of the church was a co-operative effort involving many able bodied parishioners.

Over the next twenty-five years, the congregation was under the spiritual guidance of eight different priests. The next building project was undertaken during the period from 1888-1902 while Reverend Charles Stetler was in charge and resulted in a residence for the School Sisters of Notre Dame. The following year S.S. Peter and Paul became a mission of Hobart, Indiana, attended by Reverend Thomas Janson. Father said masses here on Sundays, and it was he who went to the Mother House of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and asked for teachers. When he was informed that one were available, he retired to the chapel where he fasted and prayed until he was called out and given the promise of two teachers, and a homemaker nun. Meanwhile, back at home, the ladies of the parish, confident in their representative's, persuasive powers had been refurbishing the teachers' house that Father Stetter had built. When the sisters arrived, they found their living quarters comfortably appointed, freshly painted, and well stocked with linens.

A real flurry of construction activity took place during Father Fred Koenig's pastorate from 1905 to 1936. These years saw the building of the school (see picture) in 1906, as well as a convent in 1910 and a rectory in 1930, and in 1916, a twin towered brick church replacing the stone structure on the same site. (Stones from the former church were ground up and used as part of the foundation of the new structure.) The convent, church, and rectory are all still in use. The old school was gutted by fire in 1975 and is not usable. It had been replaced by a newer structure built in 1955 under Father John Bechmann's direction. The first graduating class from the school, in 1907, was comprised of only five students. Today there are in excess of 500 students enrolled in grade one through eighth, and the new school has seen additions in the form of a gymnasium and library.

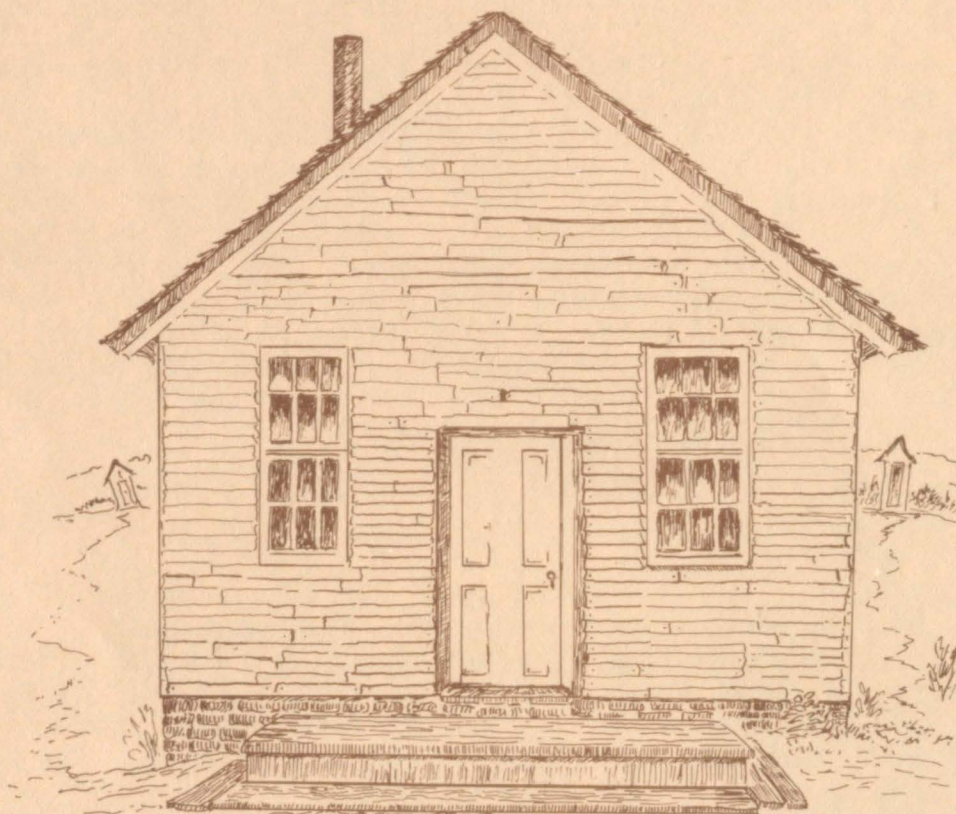
Prior even to the building of the old school, under Father Koenig, arrangements had been made for parochial education in town. The Ross Township Trustee built a one room school (see illustration) on the southwest corner of 57th and Harrison Streets on land leased from John G. Hoffman. The Trustee paid the teachers' salaries but left the hiring up to the pastor.



Usually they were young licensed teachers, graduates of Saint Francis Academy, who taught religion as well as all the required subjects from first to eighth grade. After their eighth year, the pupils customarily went on to Merrillville High School to finish up. The school was inspected by Mr. Cooper of Crown Point, and all diplomas were signed by him.

The Catholic Congregation had grown to such a degree that in the mid 60's, the parish was divided to form new parishes. The S.S. Peter and Paul Church is currently attended by its pastor, Reverend Cusimer Senderak (who was most helpful in our research) assisted by Fathers Schweitzer, Kew and Spanley. They administer to a following of greater than four thousand people.

The last century and a third has been a time of remarkable growth for the church in this community. The Church has been a source of solace and strength for townspeople whether its priests worked out of the homes of the faithful or from the three different permanent houses of worship the grateful parishioners erected over the years. How fortunate the present day parishioners are to have available counselors, a multitude of services, and a fine school at their disposal.

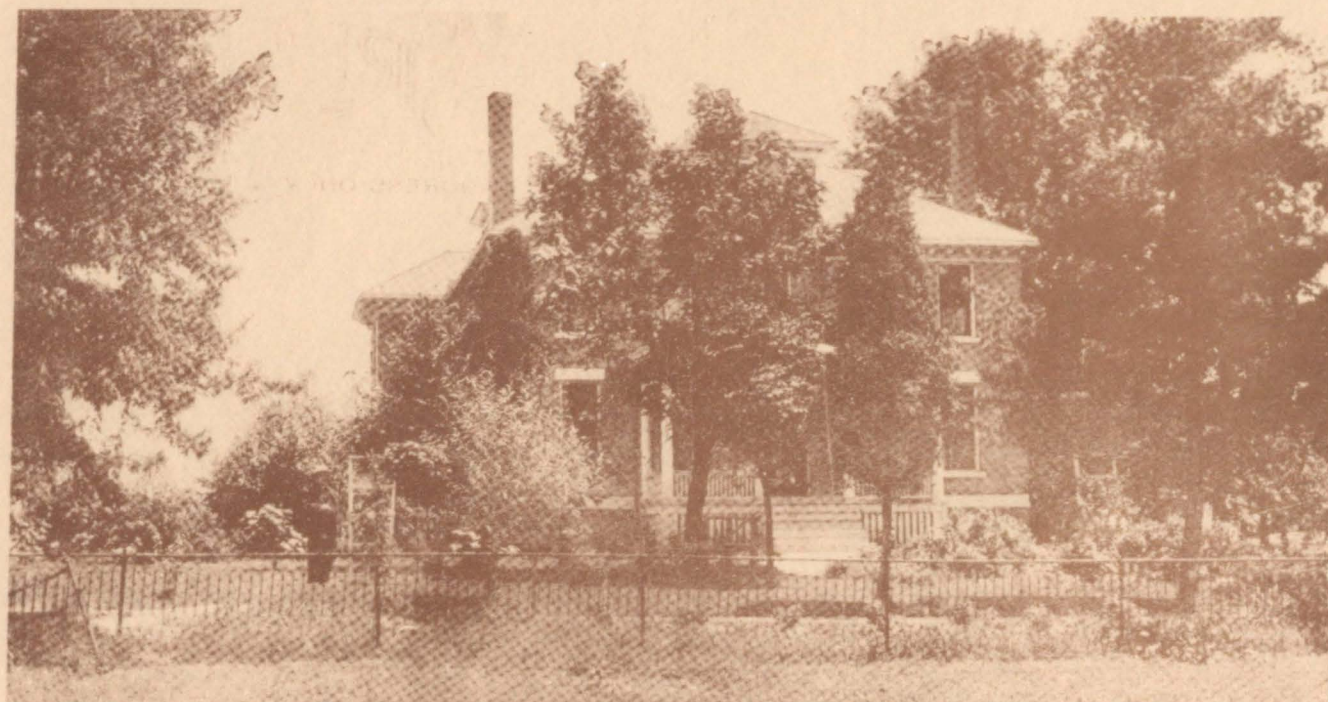
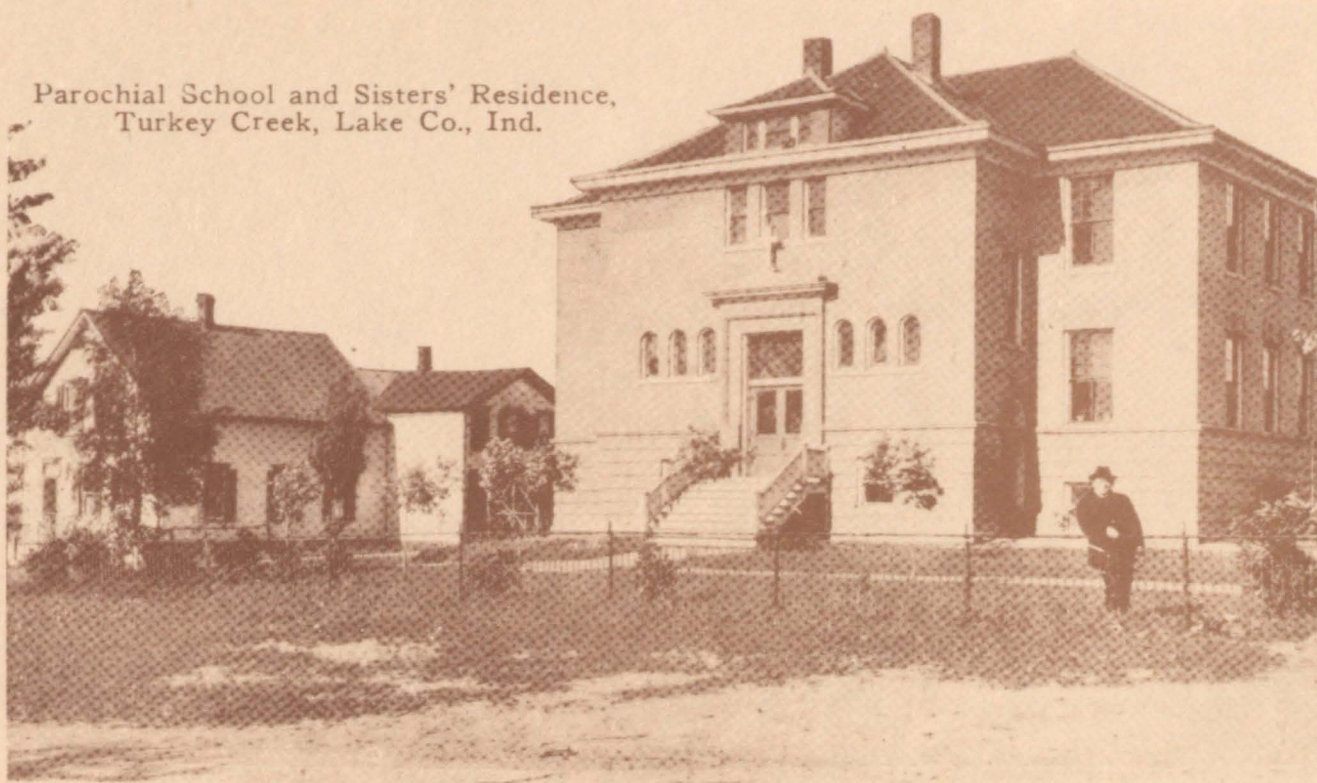


ONE-ROOM CATHOLIC SCHOOL-TURKEY CREEK

Joseph and Loretta Vlasic



Parochial School and Sisters' Residence,  
Turkey Creek, Lake Co., Ind.



Parochial Residence of St. Peter's  
And St. Paul's Church-Turkey Creek





S.S. Peter and Paul Church





S.S. PETER AND PAUL CHURCH



## SYKES HOME

The approach to the Sykes home is rather dramatic. After passing a wide expanse of farmland, one encounters a thick grove of trees that hides the home until the last second when the large two-story brick residence looms up and totally arrests one's attention. The four gable house, with its twin bay windows on the front exposure and small portico on the side, is Italianate in design and bespeaks its owner as a person of wealth and position.

The house was erected circa 1875 to be the residence of the Charles Sykes family. Charles, a native New Yorker, born in 1818, brought his wife Susan, here sometime between 1853 and 1855. The couple had ten children, several of whom had been born in the "Empire State" and had made the trip west with their parents. Their eldest, a daughter Rebecca, died at the tender age of twenty-four in 1866.

The Sykes family was intimately associated with other well-to-do and influential families in the area, most notably with the Haywards, who became in-laws twice over when George Hayward won the hand of Charles' daughter Mary Sykes, and again when Mary's brother William claimed Amanda Hayward as his bride.

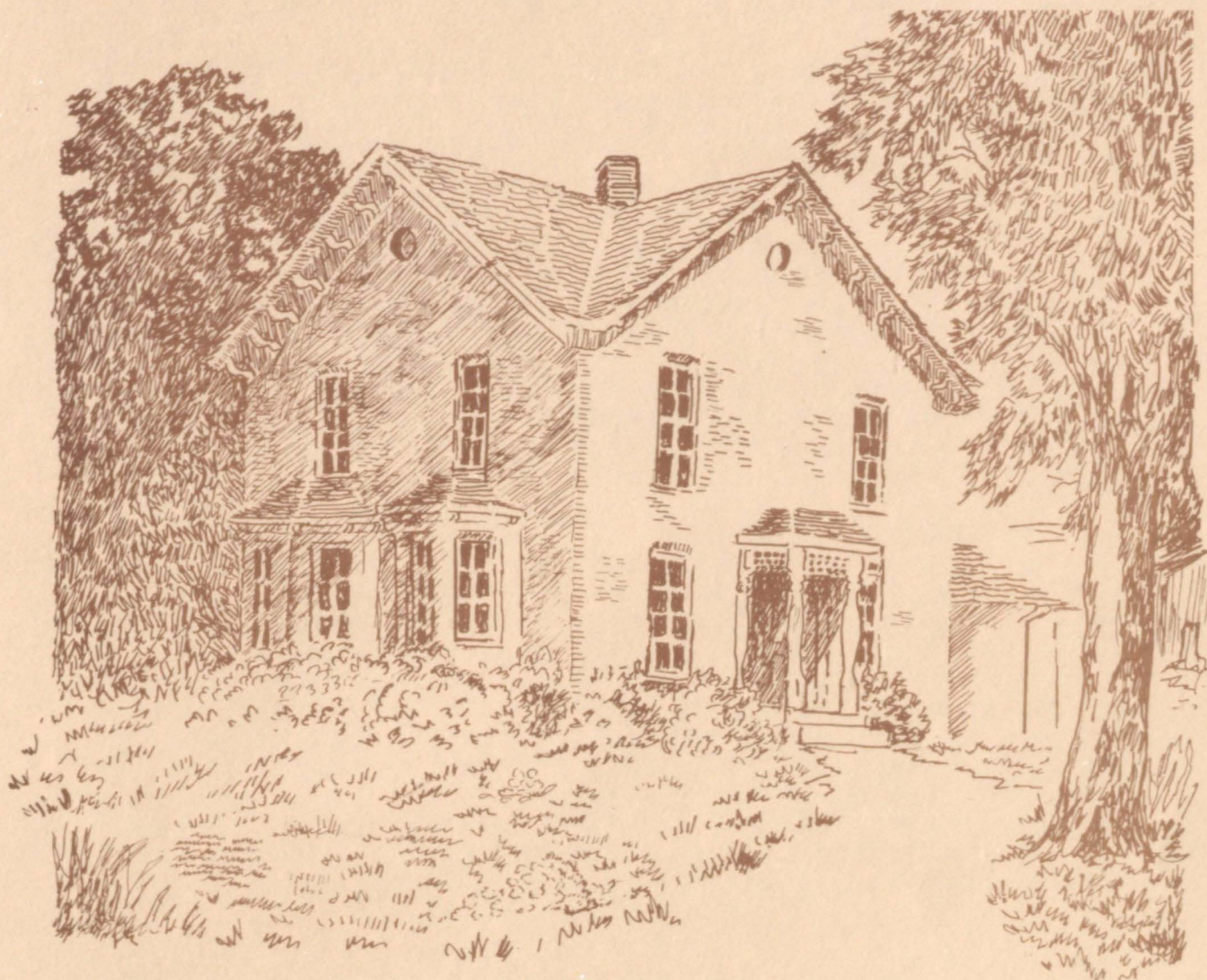
The century old home is part of a large farm that, complete with outbuildings, still survives today. Unlike many of the old farms, the former Sykes acreage has not been subdivided and parceled out. The farm is located at the corner of Colorado and 61st Avenue, or what used to be known as Adams Crossing, near the Porter County Line. (The Sykes children attended the nearby Adams School.) Today the descendants of the Sykes lineage are scattered throughout the county and the farm is the property of the family of the late Shultz.

## DEMMON STO.

The long narrow building constructed largely of blocks and partially of brick, that competed with the Stoltz store for local trade, was built in 1924 by Walter Demmon, son of John and grandson of Julius Demmon.

Before Walter became the proprietor of the Demmon store, he had been a farmer. He retired from farm life, moved to town and purchased what had been the residence of Duddly





SYKES FARMHOUSE

Merrill. Some years later he erected a new home nearby and offered the Merrill home for rent. Two or three lots down from the Merrill home, adjacent to his second home, near the corner of Seventy-third and Broadway, he erected his business. That location was a real hub of activity in those days, what with the train station right behind the store and a gas station, run by Art Boldt, nearby to service cars which had not yet graduated to near necessity status but were well on their way from being considered newfangled novelties.

Besides being a retail establishment, Walter's store had restaurant facilities that could most aptly be described as an ice cream parlor. Many young people made the awning fronted building their hang-out and it was conveniently located to the school which was across the street. Sixteen year old Neva

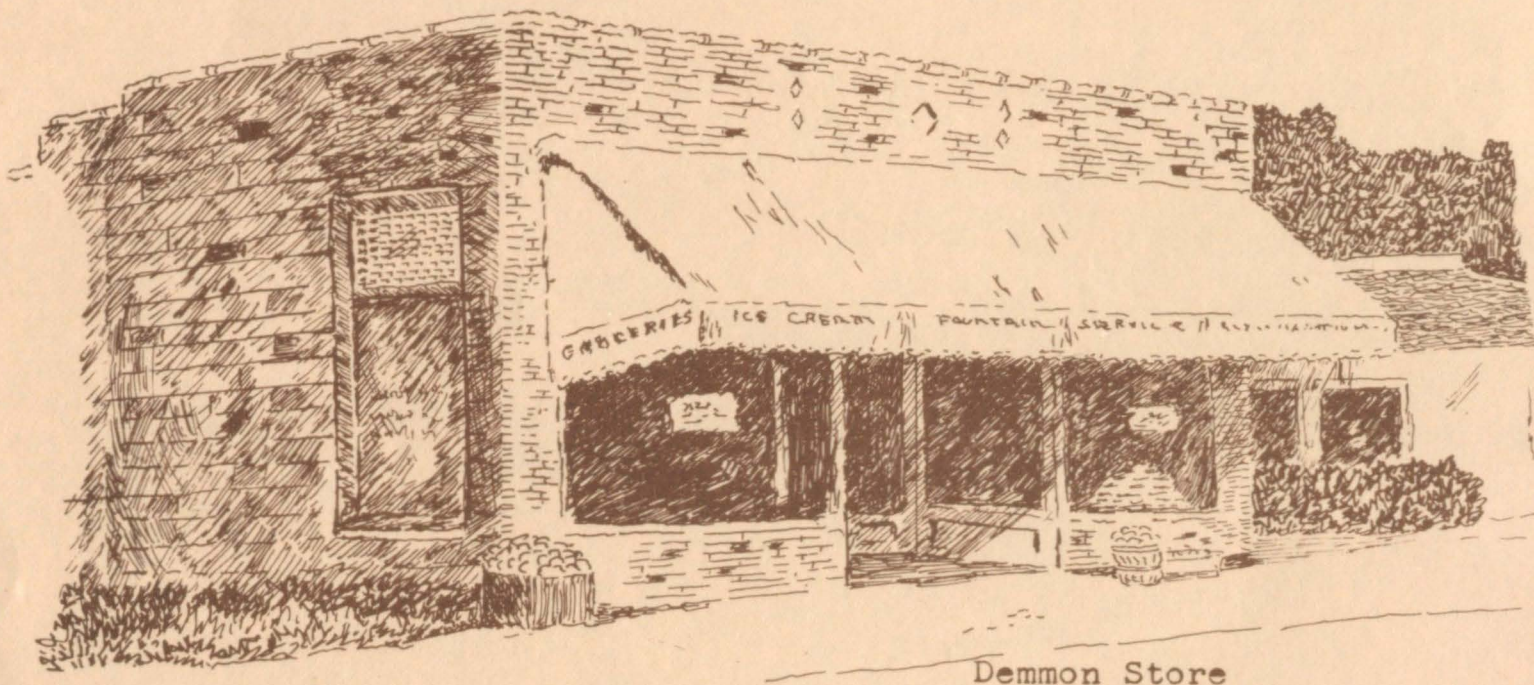


Shoup, who lived down the road next to the church, in her capacity as "soda jerk" kept the customers satisfied with a repertoire of ice cream delights.

For those who required more substantial nourishment or who were not devotees of ice cream's sweet, cold enchantment, a situation difficult for many of us to imagine, Walter operated a hot dog stand outside the store. The aroma of sizzling hot dogs doubtless lured many a motorist to the stand for the refreshment of a meaty dog and a cold drink.

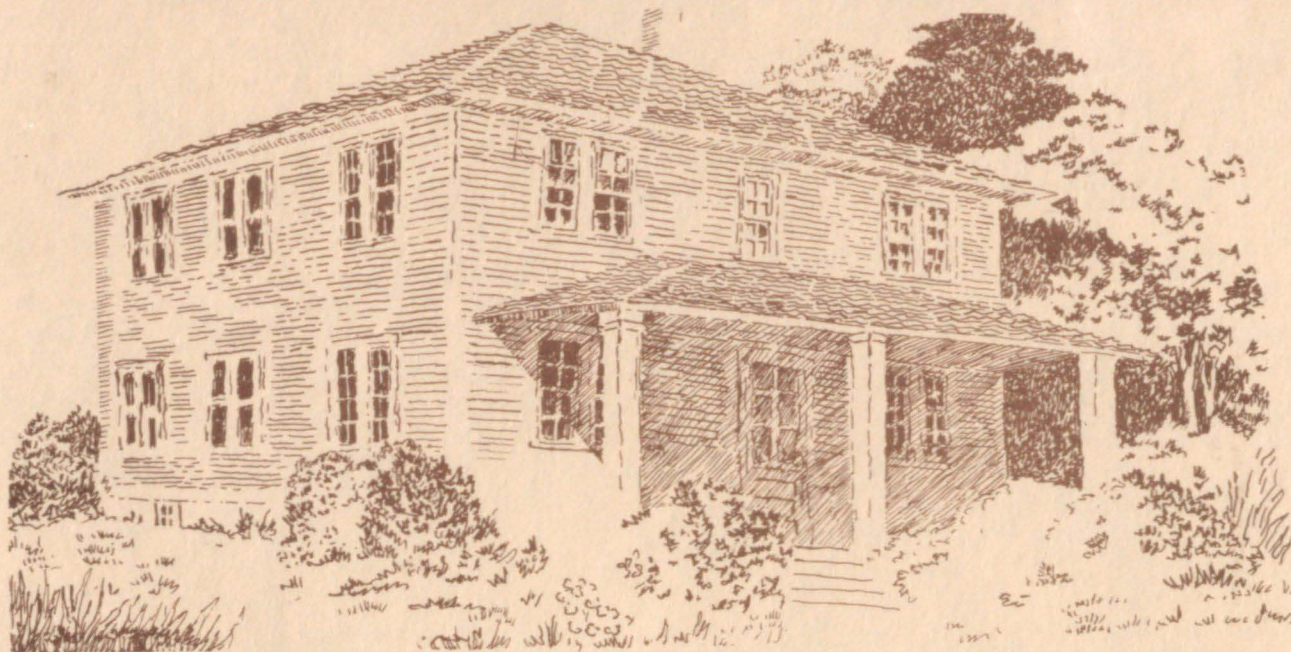
During the Depression years, it was not uncommon for down-on-their-luck men to visit the store in search of a handout. Good hearted Walter gave them a meal and a bag to take with them to sustain them on their way.

Walter was married to Tillie Schnabel, daughter of another pioneer family, and the couple had two children, Leslie, who died in an auto accident in 1933, and Keith. A member of the fourth generation of Demmons in Ross Township, Keith wed Mabel Hendricks and the couple made their home in the house Walter had built adjacent to the store. After Walter's death, Keith took over the operation of the store and ran it for many years until modern supermarkets all but made his enterprise obsolete. The store closed its doors in 1972 and Keith lives in retirement on the Demmon property on 73rd Avenue. Keith's daughter, Jean Yarras, a representative of the fifth generation of the Demmon clan, resides in the historical Merrill-Demmon house that Walter had occupied.



Demmon Store





GRUEL HOME

### GRUEL ESTATE

The Gruel Estate is located on a beautiful, wooded curving road in an atmosphere that breathes serenity. The number and immensity of the buildings on the ground bespeak the wealth of its owner, John Gruel. John, a native of Germany, came here in 1873, took Louise Nickel of Ross Township as his wife, bought 120 acres of land, and parlayed his efforts into an estate that eventually required guards at its fenced borders. Eventually helicopters were employed to drop the monthly payroll to the farm below.

This self-made man operated a lucrative dairy business. More milk went out on wagons to be shipped by rail to Chicago, Illinois, from his farm than from any other in the area. A long narrow barn, 36 feet wide by 90 feet long, with gabled roof, square windows spanning its length, and multiple entrances was used to house his dairy cows. He had two other large barns, taller but not as long, with two extra large silos. The farm also had the usual assortment of outbuildings, i.e. springhouse etc. The simple but well constructed two-story house in which his twelve children (six boys and six girls) were raised, is situated near a long drive that branches off the main road. Formerly a wagon path allowed traffic to pass his house. The home has a hipped roof and a porch set in the center of the facade.

Today the Gruel Estate, which is located on Randolph Street, is known as the Supervisor's Club, and the facilities are used to stable horses belonging to area residents. A dining room is also located on the grounds. The Gruel family home stands empty and neglected amid the activity that abounds in the barns and restaurant.



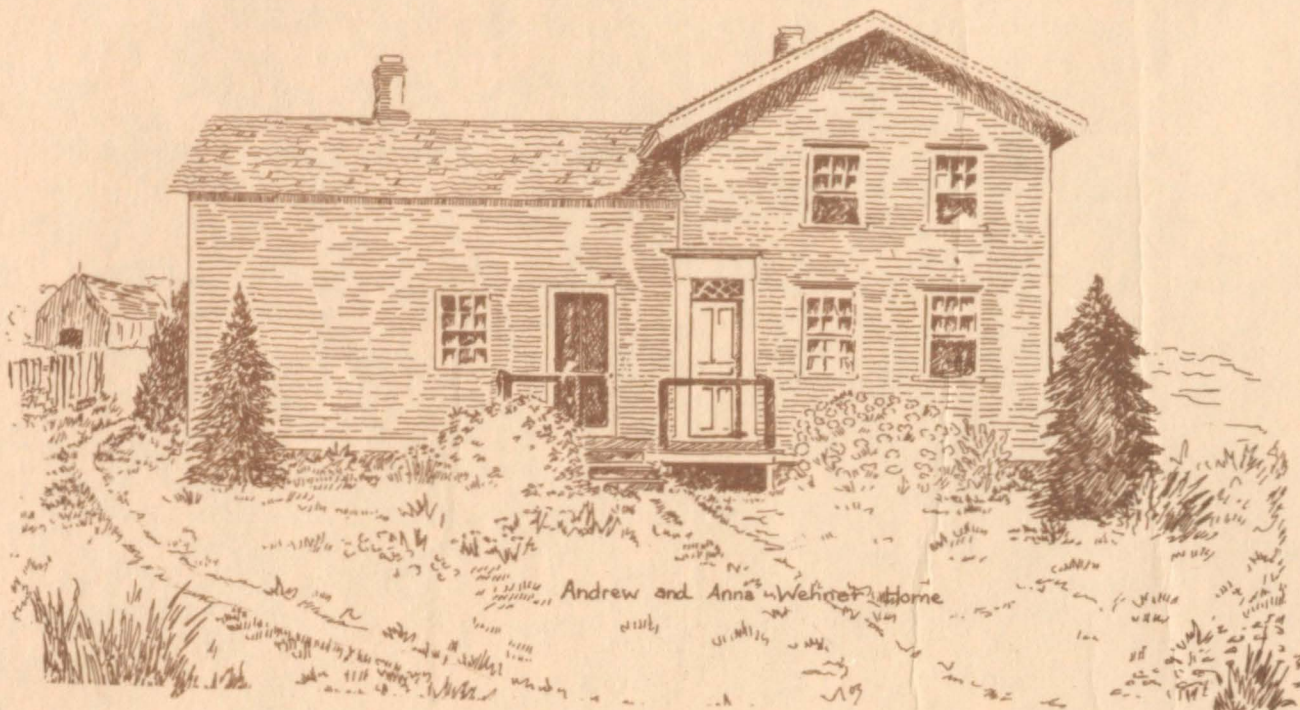
## WEHNER HOUSE

Another contributor to the rich legacy the German immigrants willed to this area is Andrew Wehner, who came here in 1854 and built the home that stands just east of Cleveland on the south side of the Grand Trunk Railroad on land he purchased from the government.

Andrew wed Anna Hoffman, daughter of George Hoffman, and the couple had five children, John, Michael, Anna, Theresa, and Margaret. For a time Andrew operated a post office from the two-story frame house.

When son John married, he brought his wife, Wilanene (Hartmen) Wehner of Crown Point, to the old homestead and he farmed it for several years. Their four children, Marcella, Lawrence, Roy, and Edward, were born there, and Marcella (Mrs. Frank Shapley) remembers winters when the only relief from the cold was an old stove and piles of blankets, and for the boys sleeping on the east side of the house, their quilts did double duty as insulators and as protection against the snow as the white flakes would filter through the cracks in the walls.

Once the house faced open fields and meadows. Today it fronts on an exclusive subdivision, Brookwood. Like its environment, the house has changed. The modest frame dwelling that cost circa \$300 to build has been so drastically altered, added to, and remodeled that it is currently worth thousands





## SILAS ZUVERS' HOUSE

Solomon Zuvers came to this county with his father, Amos, in 1836 and was one of the first settlers in the township. Father Amos was a rugged man who preferred trapping, trading, and traveling with the friendly Pottawatomie Indians to partaking of the comforts of white man's civilization. Solomon very early became adapted to his father's ways and was not much dismayed by the relative inavailability of formal education. 'Twas no matter,' for Solomon was schooled in the ways of the wilderness.

In 1848, Solomon succumbed to a case of "Gold Fever" and left his bride, Sabrina Hall, to fend for herself while he and Amos sought the treasured mineral in California. Father and son crossed the country on foot, a journey that took several months. When they returned, they invested some of their profits in the construction of a two-story, four room log cabin built by Mathias Elbert. In later years green siding obscured the log nature of the dwelling.

Sabrina and Solomon had two sons, Silas and Eugene. Silas was a character in his own right and not in the pattern of his father and grandfather. Silas took advantage of educational opportunities and attended the log school that was located near Broadway and 73rd. He held education in such high regard that he eventually became a teacher who lent his services to several schools including Witheral District School on 93rd Avenue. Many Merrillville residents received their early instruction under his tutelage.

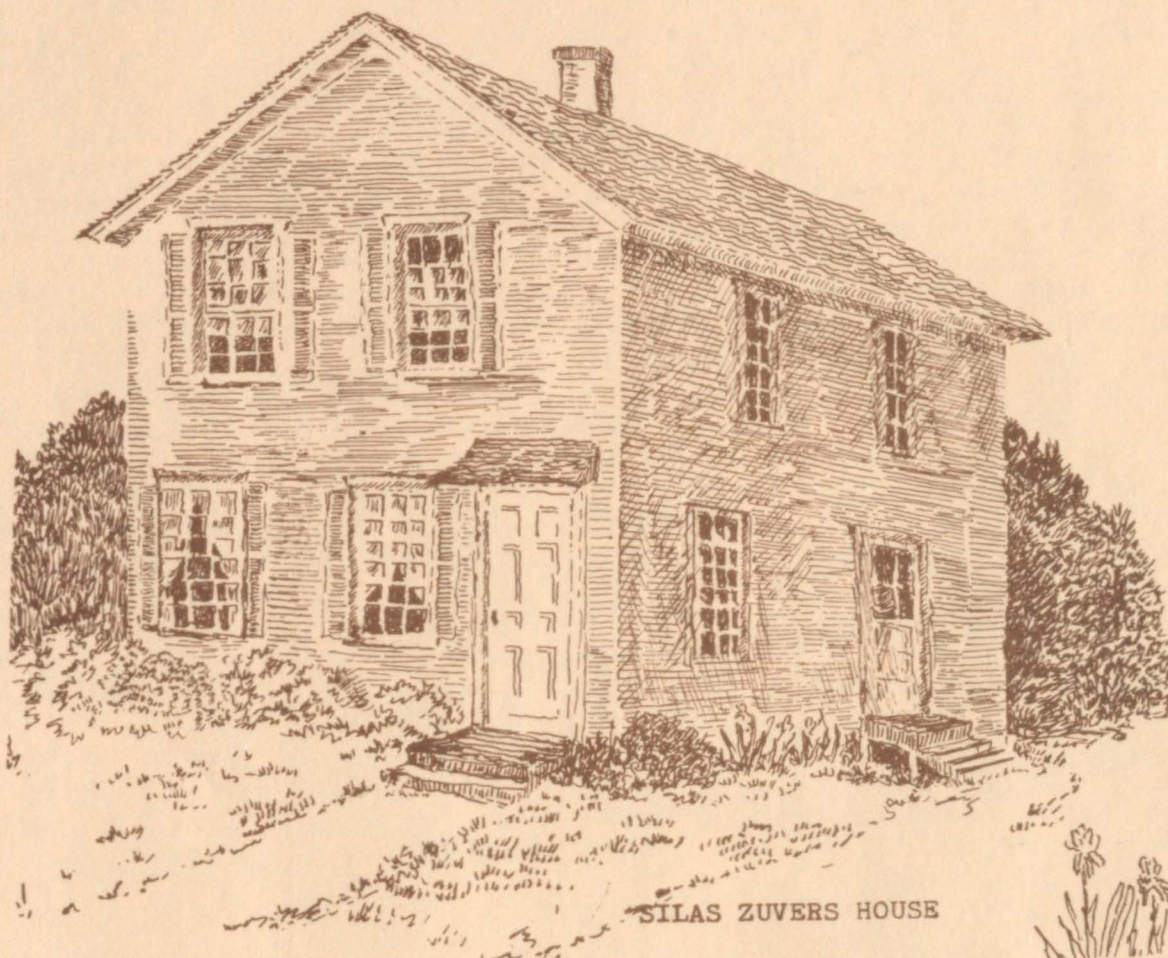
Like the man, Silas's house was unpretentious. The long narrow house was built with the gable projecting toward the street, and the building lacked the lateral wing that characterizes many homes of the area. The year of the construction is uncertain but is believed to have been erected between 1870-1900, a decade that was marked by a flurry of building activities in Merrillville. The house is relatively unchanged. A door in front has been removed and the exterior has been covered with asbestos siding.

Silas carried mail on horseback between Crown Point and Merrillville and later became postmaster. He operated the post office assisted by his wife, Lydia Barton Zuvers, from their home, which the public entered through a door on the side of the building.



Silas is remembered for the dedication he brought to his life's pursuits and for his character and personality. He is also remembered for some eccentricities in appearance and behavior. Silas had a peg-leg from the knee down and carried a cane... but not to assist him in walking. He felt that the cane conferred an air of authority upon him. He was also an inveterate tobacco chewer whose aim was so accurate that he is reputed to have been able to hit a spittoon clear across the room without fail.

Though not cut from the same mold as some of his contemporaries like Duddly Merrill and Marion Pierce in that he never developed their business acumen or their polish, this pioneer son nevertheless enriched the community in his own way through his interest in educating the town's young people, which equipped them with the means of improving on their parents' accomplishments.





## KRIETER-HALFMAN

The Krieter-Halfman house was located on a large tract of land situated between Broadway and Georgia Street, just east of MacDonald's Restaurant. The two-story narrow frame structure was built in 1865 by a Mr. Koch, and was purchased in 1882 by Jacob Krieter, a German immigrant who had brought his wife and children here the preceding year. His eldest son, Fred Krieter, having settled in Ross Township in 1871, had written to his father of the promising future for the family in this country. With this in mind, and the threat of the German government some day impressing his offspring into military service, Jacob came to America.

Jacob's family resided in the small home many years, and after Jacob retired, his son Frank and his young bride occupied the dwelling until Frank was able to purchase his own farm right next to his brother Fred's place on 57th Avenue, called Krieter Road in those days.

In 1900 Frank and Amelia (Krieter) Halfman (daughter of Jacob Krieter) purchased the property. They had previously resided on the Dennis Mellon farm (see Mellon story), where seven of their children were born. (Eight more children were born in the Krieter-Halfman house, two of whom, Margaret and Helen, still reside in Crown Point). Frank built on the right wing of the house in 1903, which consisted of five large rooms, a bedroom and a dining room on the first floor, and three bedrooms on the second floor. The dining room which contained an unusually large wooden table (which seated the seventeen members of the family three times a day), was the largest room in the house.

Upon his retirement, Frank sold the house in 1935, and the new owner moved it to a new location. During the process of moving the dwelling it was damaged to such an extent that the owner abandoned the idea of remodeling it. Vacant and neglected for some time, the house was removed.



KRIETER-HALFMAN HOUSE



## NICHOLSON HOMESTEAD

The Reverend George Nicholson, a widower, was a native of Pennsylvania, who left the "Keystone State" with his four children, John, Emory, Isabel, and Catherine and new bride, the former Clarinda Pichett, in 1852. Eventually the family took up residence in a white two-story frame house in the western part of Ross Township on what came to be called Nicholson Road (now known as Hendricks Road), and George exchanged his pulpit for a plow.

Originally the land was the property of one David Fowler, who secured the property via a land grant signed by President John Tyler in 1843. It is thought that the house, which is still standing, was built about 1845. In 1847, the home and the land were leased to Freeman and Julia Killmer by Henry Stichleman for a period of ninety-nine years in exchange for certain services like mending, replacing buttons, bed and meals, and care of his horses. This in perpetuity lease was still in effect when the Killmers sold the property to George Nicholson in 1865 and the land has been associated with the Nicholson family, though not in a direct line, for the last one hundred and eleven years.

George raised cattle, butchered meat, and sold his beef to county stores. There was a smoke house on the premises to preserve the meat and give it that wood aged flavor. The land was well supplied with water as Turkey Creek meandered through the acreage, and the fertile land permitted George to grow potatoes and grain for profit.

Clarinda used a bell, whose clanging resounded all over the farm, to summon the men for the evening meal. The horses, upon the ringing of the bell, exhibited a behavioral response that Pavlov would have been proud to include in his research notebooks. These animals were so accustomed to the routine that at the sound of the bell, the horses, unprodded by their riders, would turn around in the fields and head straight for the house.

George's son, Emory J., brought his wife, Mary Elizabeth Pierce Nicholson (daughter of Jessie Pierce, one of our earliest settlers) to live in the family home. Some years later, Emory moved his family and retired father, George, to Hammond. After George's death, the Emory Nicholson family moved back to town, and in 1896 Emory built a new two-story frame house next to the old homestead.



Later, Emery's son Alfred, who ran a feed store with his father and who operated a silver fox farm, occupied the older house with his wife, Grace Spaulding Nicholson. Their daughter Phyllis, was born while they resided there.

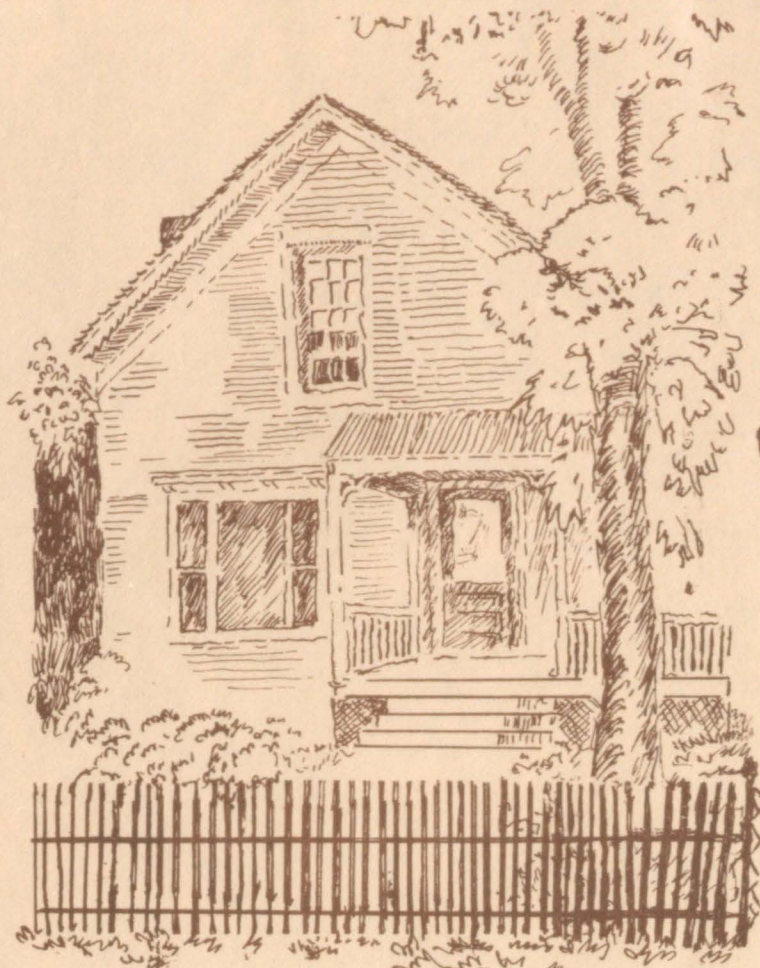
A variety of relatives have lived in the house that came into the Nicholson family when George purchased it in 1865. George's grandson, George Baker, and his wife Lena (Prott) Baker lived there while their children were young. Later they relocated to a farm on Colorado Street. Another grandson Clarence Kitchel, also spent several years in residence. John Christianson, a member of the family George's daughter Clara married into, also lived there.

For many years the house was occupied by renters until 1944 when William and Letha Meyer purchased it and the house passed out of the family. William died and Letha moved in with daughter Dorothy Carlton (Mrs. John), who has taught in this area for many years. Letha's son, Leonard Meyer, then purchased the house in 1970. Leonard is husband to Alma Christianson Meyer, great-granddaughter to George Nicholson. This union restored the house to the Nicholson family. The house is now occupied by renters.

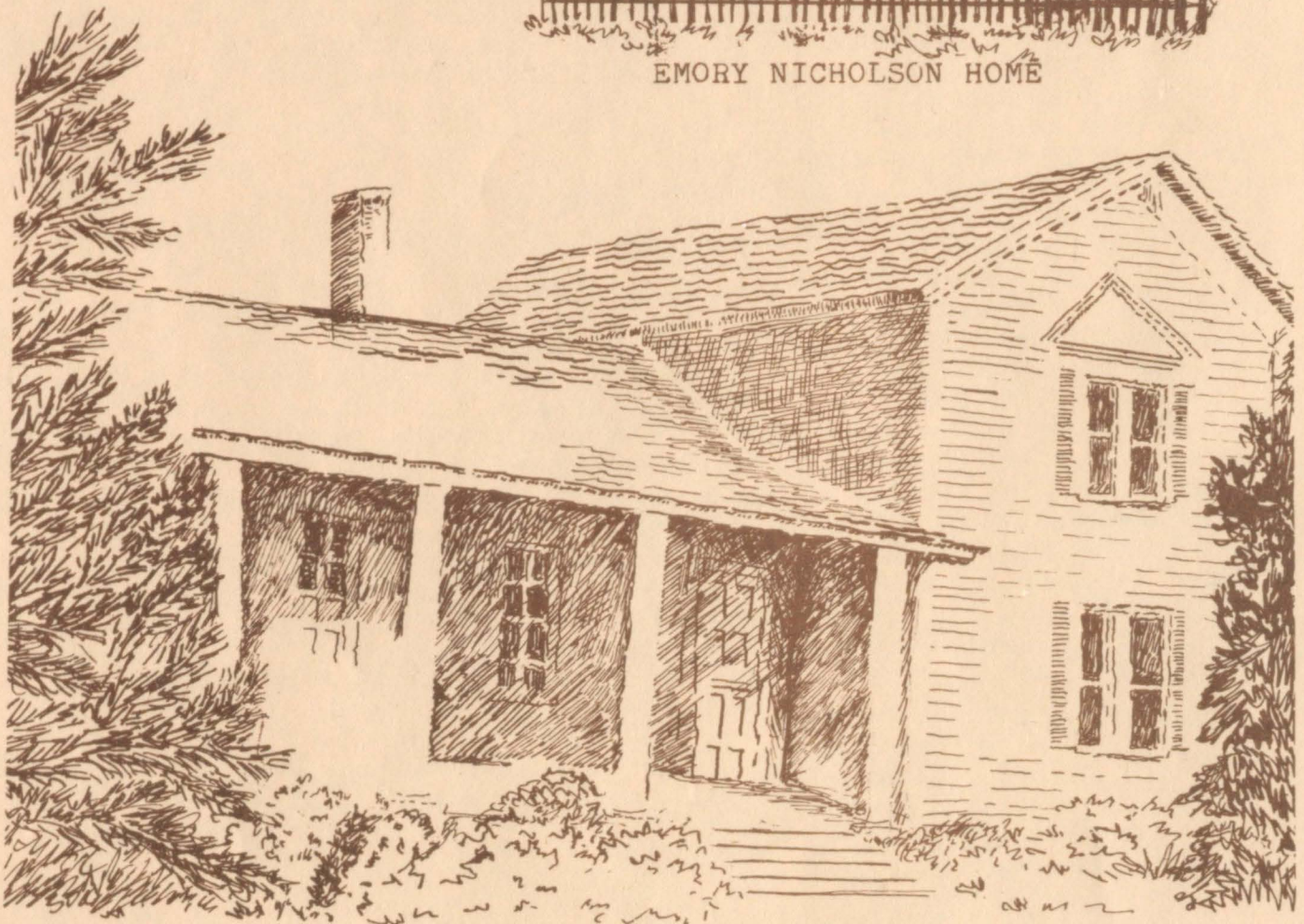
The second home associated with the Nicholson genealogy is the frame structure Emory erected in 1896 after he returned from Hammond. The history of the disposition of this dwelling is no less complicated than that of George's house. Emory resided there until his death in 1923. The house then sheltered many renters, some of whom were related to early pioneer families including Henry Franz and the Halls. Mr. and Mrs. William Meyer also lived in this Nicholson house as well as in the one associated with George.

Today George's great-great-granddaughter, or Emory's great granddaughter, Sharon Meyer Crist, resides there with her husband Lorenzo Crist. The couple took possession in 1960 and Lorenzo's business, the C & C Ornamental Iron Company is located behind the house on what was Nicholson farmland. The house is relatively unchanged on the outside save for the removal of an iron rail gate and fence in front of the house and the addition of a family room onto the back. The windows from the new family room afford a beautiful view of variable landscape from geometrically cut fields to stands of trees to gentle slopes bisected by Turkey Creek as it passes close to the house. Sharon and Lorenzo have two children, Michael and Michelle, who represent the sixth generation of the Nicholson family in this area.





EMORY NICHOLSON HOME



George Nicholson home



## THE METHODIST CHURCH

The Merrillville Methodist Church has been a focus of activity for religious and social affairs in this community for more than a century. Its origins, like those of the Turkey Creek Catholic Church, are rooted in meetings in private homes. Later, circuit riders like the Reverend Charles Barton conducted services biweekly in a log building that stood where Broadway crosses the old Lincoln Highway.

In 1862, the church was assimilated into the Methodist Episcopal Conference, and fourteen years later, at a Union Band Camp meeting held in Merrillville, the desire for a permanent House of Worship was voiced. In 1879 under Reverend Sanders, their dream became reality when the building illustrated here was erected and outfitted with pulpit, chairs, chandeliers, carpet, and a communion set through the efforts of the newly formed Ladies Aid Society. The structure, located on 330 one block west of Broadway, was embellished with railings and pews handmade of black walnut hauled from Furnessville. A six hundred twenty-five pound bronze bell summoned the faithful to services.

Over the decades the church acquired and sold several structures. The Ladies Aid Society was housed in Merrill Hall, which Charles Merrill donated in 1908. In 1909 a parsonage was built two blocks west of the church. In 1928 Merrill Hall was sold and the proceeds went to finance the Annex that was completed in 1930. In 1934 in the midst of the Depression the parsonage was put up for sale as Merrillville could not support a resident pastor. This sale helped diminish the debt on the Annex. During this time church members, like Henry Kuehl, would lead the congregation in prayer in the absence of a certified man of the cloth. In 1948, however, a new parsonage was built and the town once again enjoyed the advantage of a minister in residence. In 1958 a new church of limestone with a three hundred fifty person seating capacity was erected on East 68th Place under pastor Reverend Fred S. Wintle. Mr. Harold Knoup was the chairman of the building committee, which consisted of Clarence Greimann, Mrs. James Anderson, Gordon Birk, and Hugh Mohler. The old bronze bell that was atop the original church was moved to the new edifice to continue its faithful duties. The bell not only alerted the congregation as to the time of worship, but rang out with joy on such occasions as Armistice Day on November 11, 1918, and tolled solemnly and sorrowfully as funeral processions complete with flower girls marched under it, the clapper striking one woeful tone for each year of the deceased person's life. Today melodious chimes ring out a haunting refrain at dawn, noon, and dusk, urging believers everywhere to pause in their daily routine and turn their thoughts heavenward.



The old church building minus bell and steeple is now used by the Volunteer Fire Department. Many members mourned this transformation of their beloved church. Many would prefer to see the building, with its rich history, preserved as a monument. Oldtimers recall days when buggy loads of worshippers dressed in their Sunday best pulled up outside the church and tethered their horses to the rail at the nearby Stoltz store. Young men chafed behind starched collars; little girls were mindful not to wrinkle their ruffled skirts. Adults congregated outside the building exchanging greetings and bits of news. Within the church's beautiful confines, the faithful offered thanks to the Lord for his bounty and asked forgiveness for their sins.

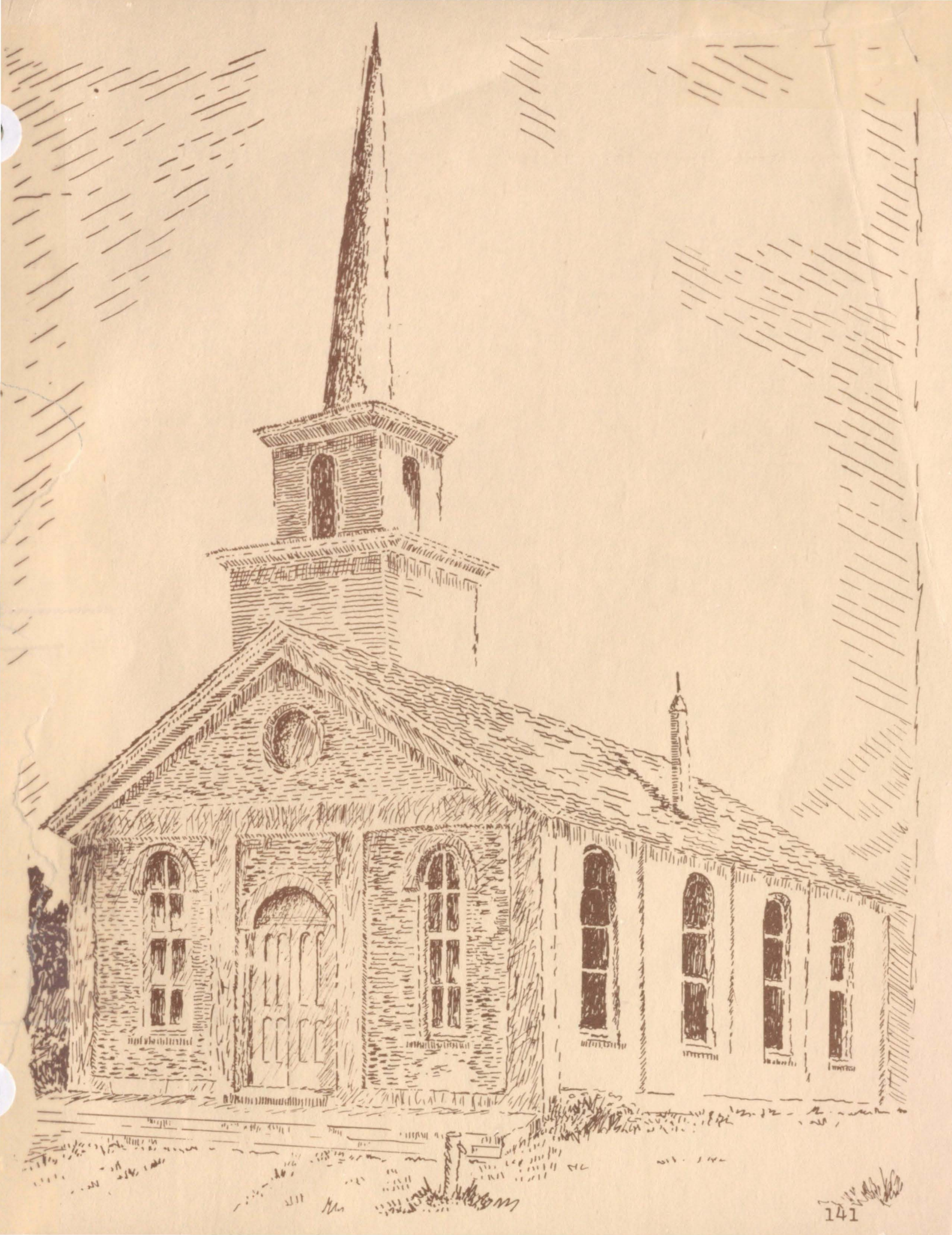
For a time music was not a part of the services, and hymnals were used that had no notes printed in them as there was some question as to the propriety of having instruments as part of the proceedings; thus hymns were sung without accompaniment, the key being set by the striking of a tuning fork. In later years it was decided that organ and piano music was sufficiently solemn and reverent to be included in the ritual. Mrs. Lillian Pierce is particularly well remembered for the addition her piano playing made to the services. Also, the talented Lillian (Kuehl) Butcher, who presently lives in Crown Point, has played for the church for over thirty years.

In countless ways the church has served the community over the last century including as spiritual guardian, as charitable organization, and as social center. This last facet is not to be underestimated in importance, for the church united proper or good will in common undertakings from graduation ceremonies to quilting bees, from chicken suppers to theatrical productions to young people's functions. From the days when the congregation was so small it numbered only one man in its assemblage to the present time the church has been a magnet drawing people from varied backgrounds into its doors and providing a place for exchange of ideas and suggestions that cannot be equalled by modern communications media, because newspapers and television, though rich sources of information, lack the warmth, the personal touch that attends social interaction.

The Church has been characterized by a membership that has given of themselves and their finances unselfishly. Charles Merrill donated a building, Mrs. Stoltz made available her oven for warming chicken pies for the suppers, Hiram Barton taught the Sunday School at age eleven and was choirmaster for years. Many members, among them Charles Boyd and Herbert Saxton, picked up hammers and paintbrushes when work needed to be done on the Annex. Mrs. Pierce and Mrs.

In Loving Memory of Hugh Lee Mohler  
By Mrs. Bertha Mohler







Coffey lent their talents to the running of the Ladies Aid. Mr. Henry Fieler has given his time, effort, money, and support to many of the Church's functions. Mr. Hugh Mohler performed a silent act of charity that went undiscovered until many years after his death. Mr. Mohler, who was a wizard in the field of electricity, lent his expertise to the setting up of a sound system for the chimes he had hoped to see installed in the new church. When the time came to put in the chimes, it was found that a lot of the work had already been done (at considerable savings to the Church) and sealed up to be preserved until such time as it was needed. Fittingly the new chimes have been dedicated to the memory of Hugh Mohler.

Devotion and dedication such as that shown by those listed above and many, many others has been the mainstay of the Church's existence in town over the last century.

The Merrillville Methodist Church merged with the United Brethren in 1969 and since that time has been known as the United Methodist Church. The current pastor is Reverend Richard J. Chrispell.

In loving memory of Charles C. Coppess  
By Mrs. Helen Coppess



## HALSTED FARMS

The Halsted family is numbered among the pioneer families of Merrillville who have witnessed the growth and development of this town from its inception in the 1830's to the present day.

James Halsted, the progenitor of this family, settled in the area in 1838 and carved from its wilderness a large productive dairy and grain farm. There are two Halsted homes of about the same age. Some believe that the house Wallace (son of James) built on 69th Avenue near Mississippi Street predates the structure father James erected (1872) at 2701 East 69th by a few years. Suffice it to say that both domiciles were constructed in the early seventies.

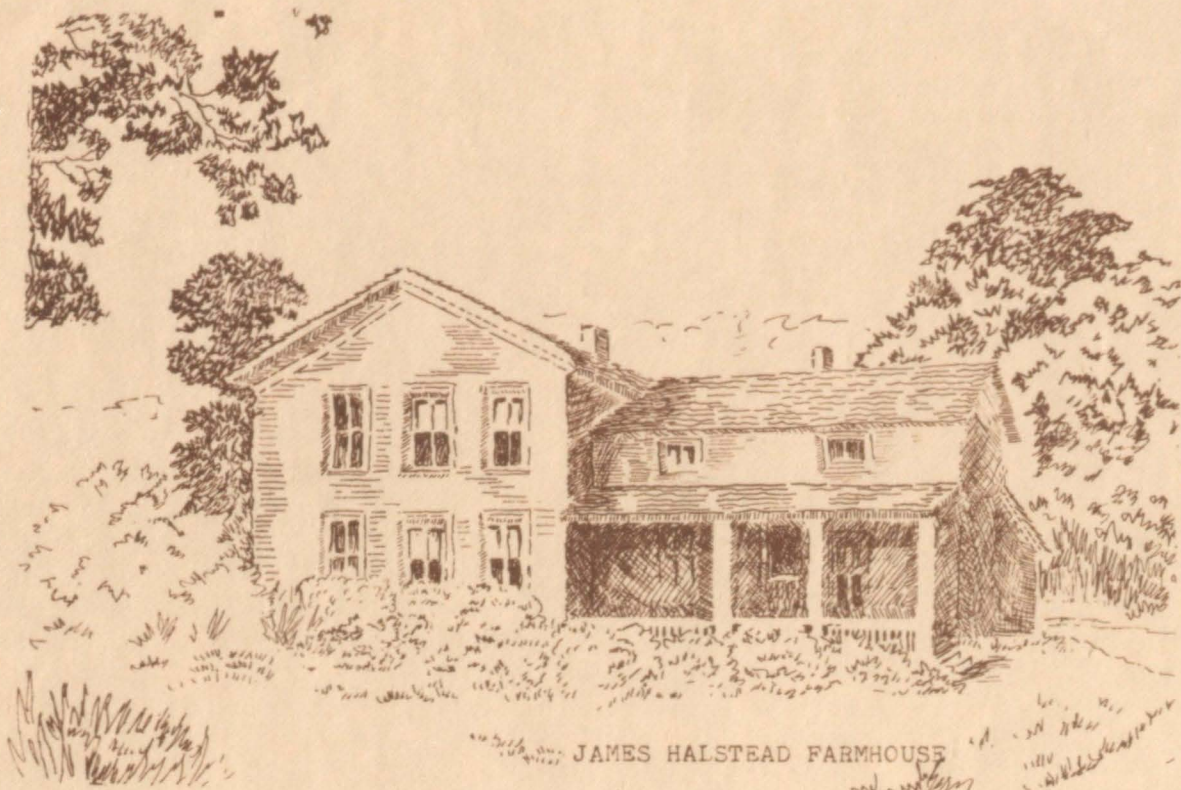
The home Wallace built has two different foundations, one of field stone and the other of brick, and this situation leads one to believe that the house was not assembled all at one time. It is known that James Montgomery, brother of Wallace, added a section in 1880. Moreover, on the second floor across the central hall from two bedrooms, is an area that was never finished. It is a skeleton of a room with one inch by twelve inch rough cut boards on the walls and floors. The Halsted children put this space to good use as a rainy day playroom.

James Montgomery Halsted raised his children in the old house and, proud of his young brood, he stained each of their names into the frame woodwork of various doors. Albert E. was inscribed on the kitchen door; the stairway entrance bore Roy's name: the names of Emma and James adorned the double French doors, etc.

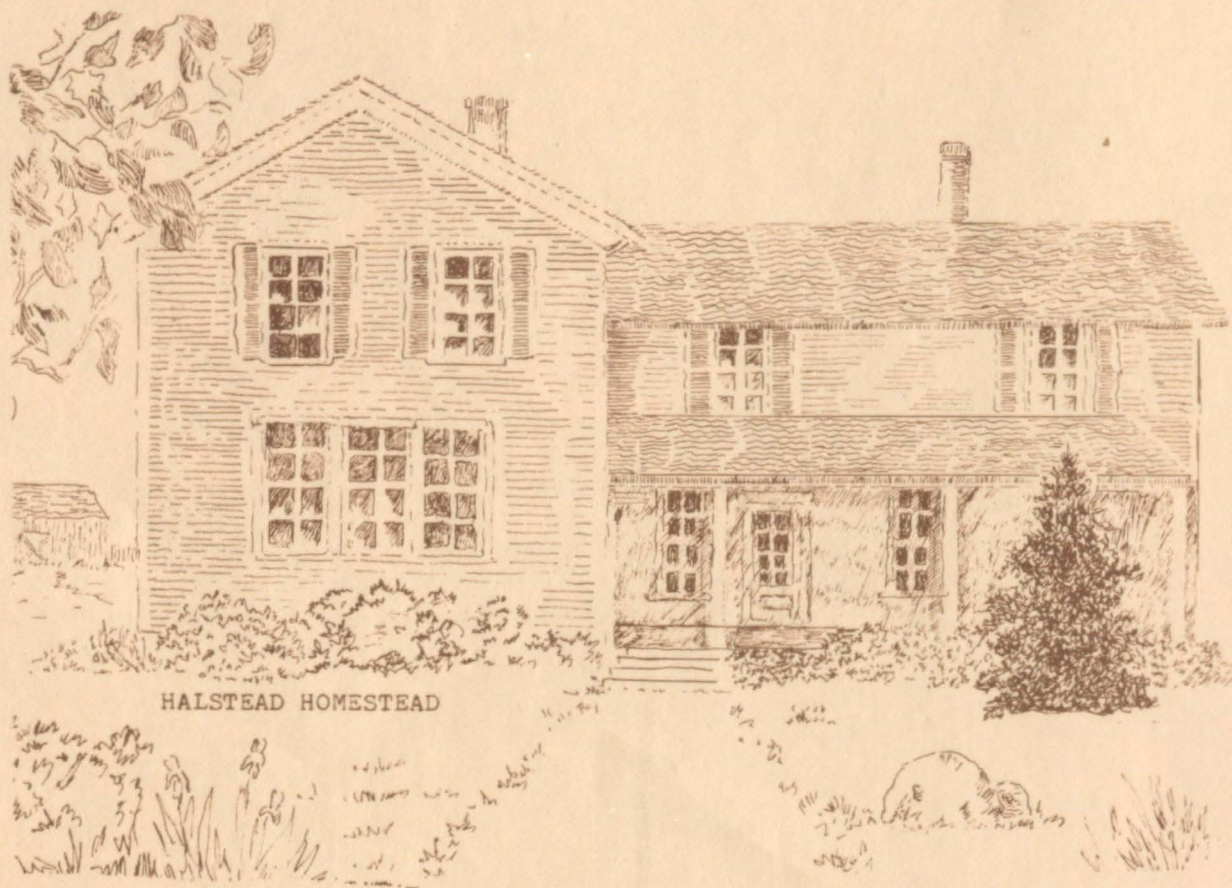
In later years James Montgomery moved to Hobart, leaving the farm in his son Roy's capable hands. Each summer James would return to the farm to live with his son. Roy's son James fondly recalls watching grandpa James sit on a large stone in front of the house and whittle for hours.

During the Depression, Roy left the farm to operate a gas station and restaurant in town. Then Jim, who had been assisting his mother in the business, left for Washington to court his future wife, Eileen. Since then this farm has not known the footsteps of a Halsted. The house has been rented out.





JAMES HALSTEAD FARMHOUSE



HALSTEAD HOMESTEAD



The nine room residence built by patriarch James, has been in the Halsted family for four generations and replaced the log cabin that was initially their home. The Halsteds transformed a wooded tract into a productive dairy and grain farm. They cleared the land, prepared the soil, planted crops, watched over them carefully, and reaped the benefits of their diligence at Harvest time. Theirs is the saga of countless "unsung heroes," the farmers of the Midwest.

When James died in 1898, his son Albert inherited the house and one hundred sixty acres which he worked until 1901, at which time he put the farm up for lease and moved to Hobart.

The year 1919 saw the return of a Halsted to the farm when Ray, son of Albert, brought his wife, Pearl (Demmon) Halsted, to live there. Their two sons, Kenneth and Malcolm, were reared on the family land, and in 1944, when Ray moved to Hobart, Kenneth took over the operation of the farm. Years later, in 1960, Kenneth followed his father to Hobart but returned twelve years later to retire to the farm with his wife Almira.

The Halsteds are proud of their hardworking heritage and that the tradition still survives. They have not only made contributions in the realm of agricultural development but have also been in community affairs and businesses. Kenneth, for example, was part of an outstanding musical group that performed at school functions and dances for some thirty years. He also served as barber in the area for forty-two years. His brother Malcolm owns the Culligan Soft Water Business in this area, and cousin Jim Halsted, who led efforts to reinstate a post office in Merrillville, and who is active in the Historical Society, lends his time to many planning and advisory groups tackling civic problems.

Kenneth and Almira Halsted





### NASSHAHN HOME AND STORE

Elizabeth Nasshahn (1845-1911) with the assistance of her sons, Emile and Gottlieb (of who reside in Oregon) and her daughter, Hattie (who lives in Brimfield, Indiana,) operated a grocery and dry goods store in this (see illustration) one-hundred year old two-story frame house, which is located on West 73rd Avenue across from the old Iddings house and adjacent to the Perry Goodrich home. The family ran a huckster wagon about town and to the farmers to attract customers who might never have entered the store. The store is reputed to have been a stage stop in earlier days.

Elizabeth met a tragic end when her clothing caught fire while she was burning brush in her back yard. Neighbor Mrs. Goodrich, first on the scene, was unable to reach her in time.

The house is presently occupied by the Powers family.



## WALTERS BROTHERS' GARAGE

Like their father, Ernest "Cheese Henry" Walters, the three sons, Howard, Leslie, and Clarence, were capable business men who undertook their enterprise (1917) when they were only eighteen, twenty, and twenty-one years of age.

At first the young entrepreneurs operated out of Elbert's Garage, an old wooden building; later they relocated to the Keilman building on 330 and Harrison Street after young John Keilman closed his operation which involved the building and repairing of race cars. The brothers had a Buick dealership and repair shop there.

Attached to the garage was a restaurant and tavern operated by Carl Gerlach (brother to Howard's wife, Pat) and his wife, Zella. Carl abandoned that business when Zella became ill, and the building then housed a variety of businesses including another restaurant, a sweet shop, a dress shop, and an ice cream shop run by Pat Gerlach Walters, who "threw in the towel" when it became apparent that her husband and her brothers-in-law (who snacked on ice cream and cake) were literally eating up the profits.

"The young bucks hung out at the Walters garage in those days," and one of them, Fred Lennertz, became sufficiently interested in the work to become Clarence ("Dutch") Walters' partner when Leslie and Howard sold out in 1923. The new firm of Walter & Lennertz Oldsmobile relocated on Broadway (its current site) soon after its establishment. The sons of the two men, James Lennertz and Kenneth Walters, took over the business in 1950. The fathers retired in 1961 and later the business became known as Lennertz Oldsmobile when Kenneth sold his interest to James.



WALTERS BROTHERS GARAGE-1917



## THE HALFMAN HOMESTEAD

The Halfman Homestead on 56th Avenue sits in an isolated pocket of antiquity surrounded by gnarled trees of considerable girth and bent with age. The two-story frame home, built by Henry Halfman circa 1870, once faced an expanse of farmland unmarked by the trappings of civilization and now fronts on a modern real estate development. The road serves as a line of demarcation as it bisects the past and the present. On one side can be seen the quiet simplicity of a once active farm and on the other the crowded confusion of a contemporary subdivision, truly a study in contrast.

William Halfman, son of Henry and Mary Ellen (Mellon) Halfman, was born on this farm in 1875 but left it for Chicago at age sixteen. While in the "Windy City", William pursued a variety of occupations including policeman, milkman, and streetcar conductor but abandoned them all in favor of returning to operate his father's three-hundred-acre farm in Ross Township.

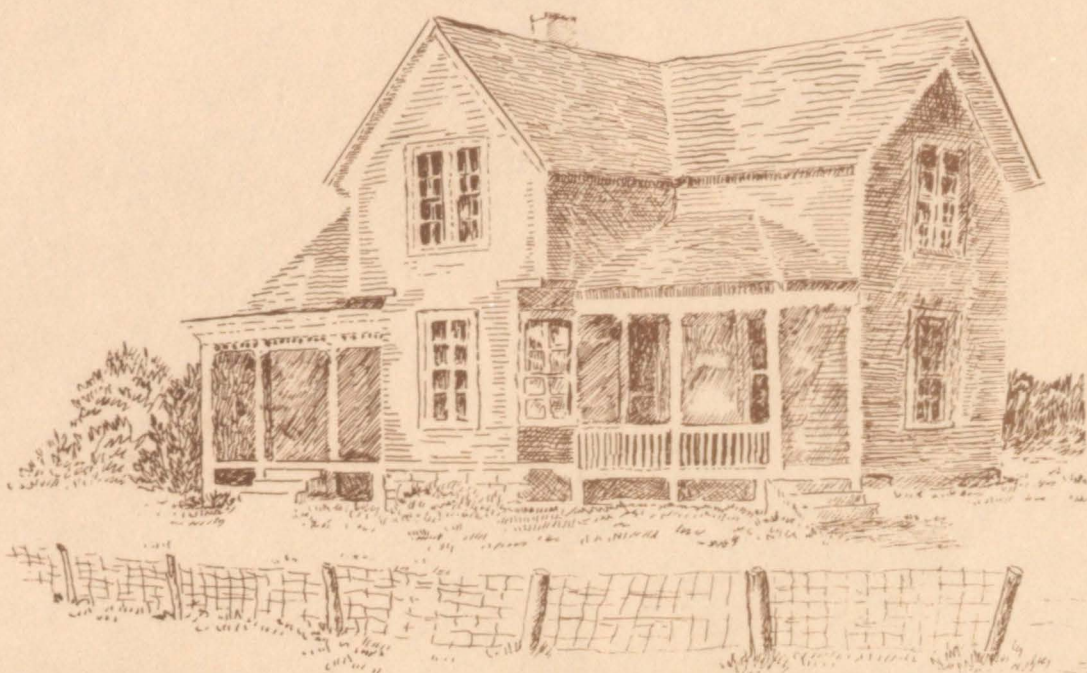
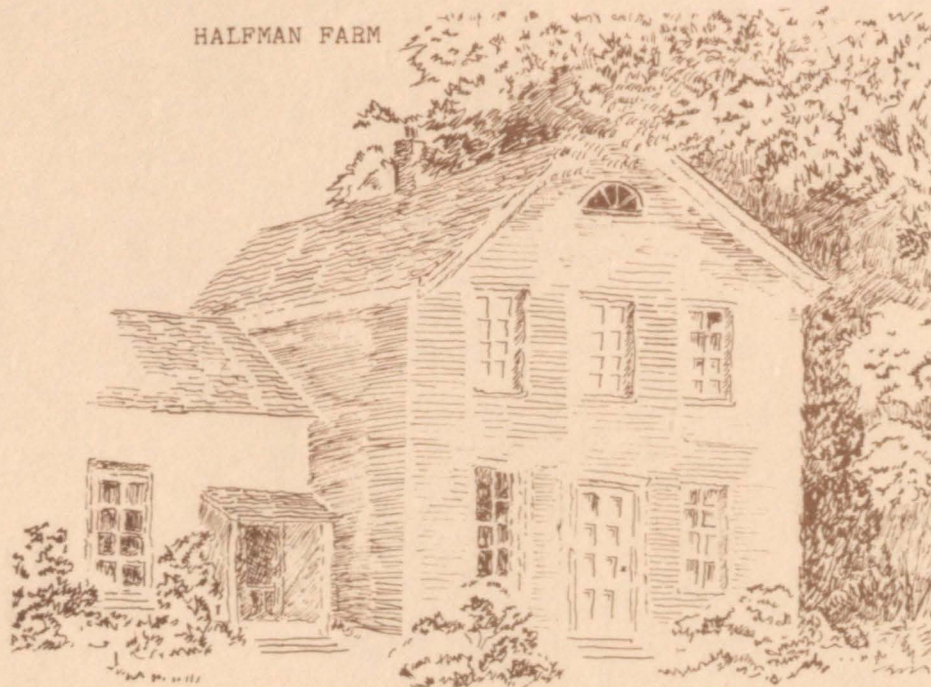
In 1902, William undertook the manufacturing of cigars on the farm. He advertised his high grade five cent smoke with a gimmick that rivals the Goodyear Blimp for effectiveness. His balloons contained promissory notes redeemable for a box of his "Halfman White Ribbon" Cigars. A deal like that must have prompted a lot of sky searching in hopes of securing a sample of Halfman's tobacco delights.

William married Clara Klein of Chicago. The couple had five children, Clara, Edward, Marie, Mildred, and Francis. Tall and heavyset William is remembered as a man of imposing physical presence. His robust physique did not make him appear ominous though, as he was blessed with a genial personality that made him a superb salesman and a powerful persuader in civic matters.

After William's death, his son Edward, who had assisted his father for many years, took over management of the farm, aided by his wife Mabel (Weinand) Halfman, daughter of Minnie and Joseph Weinand. Edward passed away recently and is survived by his wife, Mabel and their son Raymond.



HALFMAN FARM



Frank Christensen Home

#### FRANK CHRISTENSON HOME

Frank Christenson, son of Nelson Peter and Elizabeth Ann (Butts) Christenson, lived in the pictured house on Nicholson Road. He married Clara Nicholson, daughter of Emory and Elizabeth (Pierce) Nicholson. Frank, who resides in Hessville, celebrated his ninety-fourth birthday in May.



## JOSEPH FRANZ HOME

Joseph Franz, born in 1842, came here from Germany as a young boy with his mother and stepfather. Brother to Balzar Franz (whose history is treated elsewhere in this book), Joseph stayed on the family farm until he was of age, then moved to a two-story frame house with a small side addition that dates back to 1865. Joseph and his wife, Cylvia (Cyphers) Franz, brought up their brood in the shrubbery encircled house on Cleveland Avenue. Of their fifteen children, only Henry, the youngest son, survives.

The Franz family and their descendants contributed greatly to the agricultural development of this area, and their name is linked through marriage with several pioneer families, many of whose names ought, by now, to be quite familiar to the reader. A partial list of Joseph's childrens matches follows; Marie wed Joesph Hein, Joesph married Helen Bothwell, Clara made in-laws of the Wehners by becoming Mrs. John Wehner, Sabina and Aloysius chose their spouses from the Schneider family, marrying Anthony and Mary respectively, Henry claimed Agnes Gresser as his bride, Francis became Mrs. Edward Koch, Applonia took John Hein as her husband, Frank took Mary Klein as his partner, and Anna added the Franz name to the Krieter lineage when she married Frank Krieter. Many descendants of their unions still reside in the area.

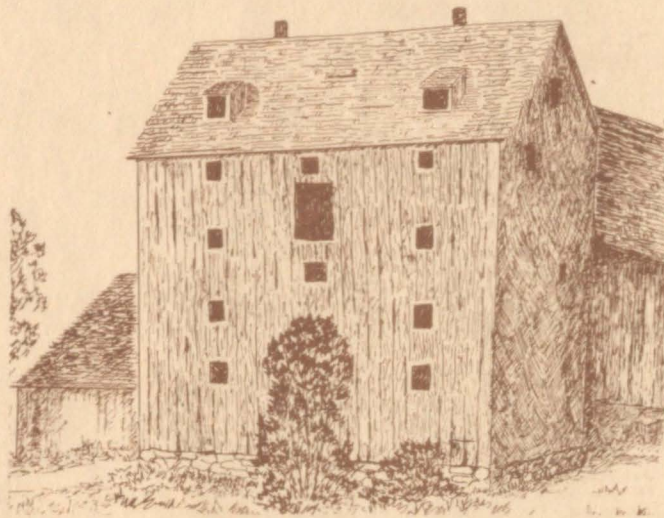


Leonard and Clara (Johnson) Franz





The Joseph Franz Family  
 Front row: Henry, Sabina, Victoria, Francis  
 Second row: Anna, Ceceila, Joseph and Cylivia Cyphers, Marie  
 Third row: Applonia, Joseph Jr., Edward, Frank, Clara, Aloysius



FRANK KRIETER BARN

This unusually contoured barn that takes its concept from architecture of Frank Krieter's homeland, Germany, is located on 57th Avenue (originally called Krieter Road) just off Cleveland Avenue.





Main St. in Merrillville, Ind.

### Main Street in Merrillville, Indiana

A street scene on the Old Lincoln Highway about 1907. The buildings illustrated here are the California Hotel, Stoltzs General Store, Merrill Hall, Ladies Aid Building, Burt Saxton home, Zuvers house, the Barton residence, the Methodist Church, and the Vaness house.



## DEEP RIVER

This picturesque area was once a section of Ross Township but has since been annexed by Hobart. It is a tree shaded village tucked away among the woods on a curving road and watered by the stream from which it derives its name. A bronze tablet in the center of the village commons commemorates the contributions of the settlement's founder, John Wood.

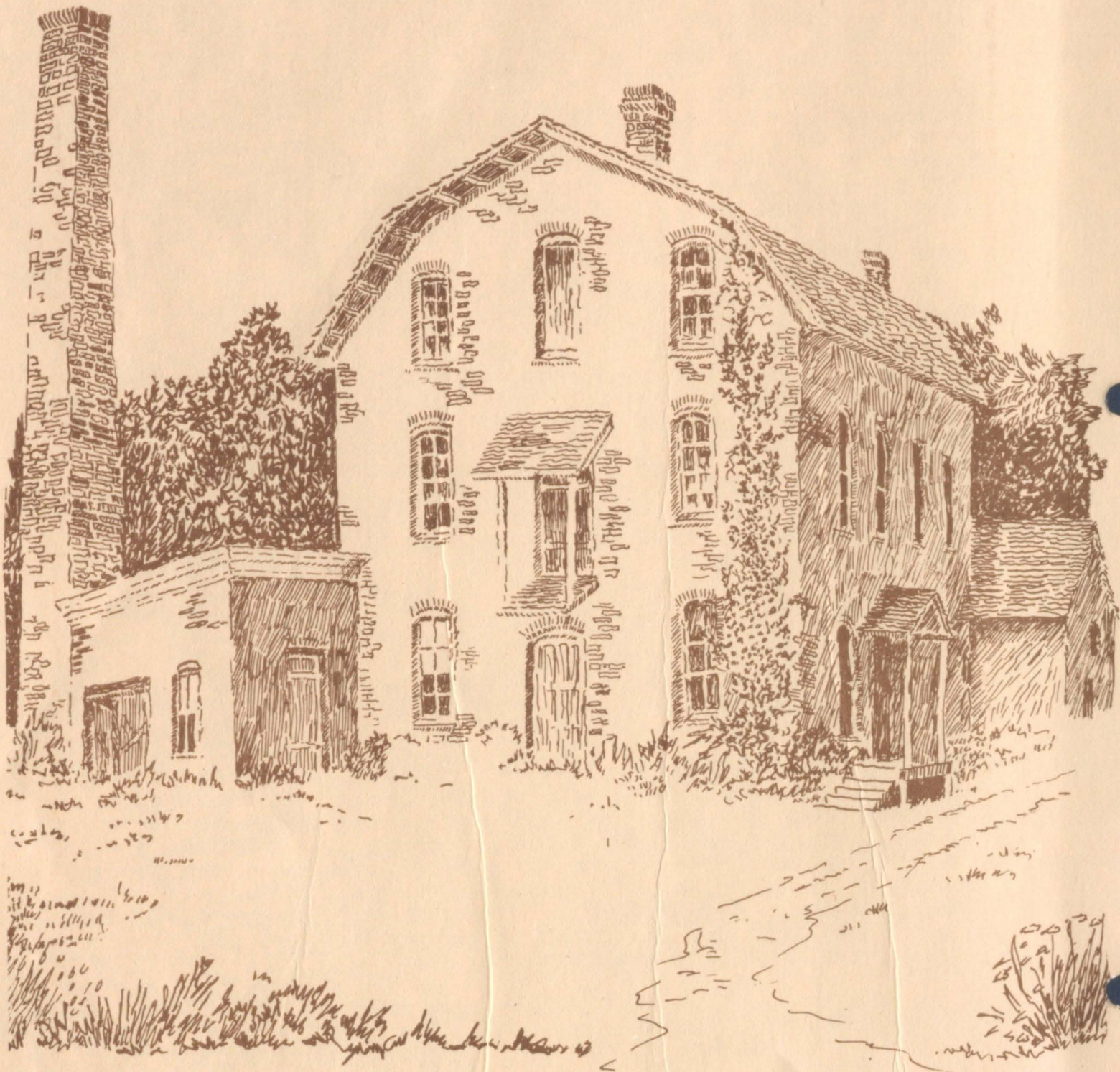
Wood, a native of Salem, Massachusetts, came into this area that formerly was the hunting grounds of the Pottawatomie Indians and erected a log cabin at Deep River in 1835. He then returned to the East for his wife, Hannah Pattee Wood. In his absence a senator "floated" his claim in the name of the old Indian called Quashma. He had envisioned a mill on that land, so he purchased the land from the Indian, paying one thousand dollars for it instead of the two hundred dollars he had expected to pay the government.

In 1837 John built a saw mill and the next year built the first grist mill (illustrated here) in all of Lake County. The three-story red brick building was nearly surrounded by a dense thicket of trees and its rear exposure was on the stream. Farmers from miles around brought their grain and unloaded it at the side door for grinding and often waited two to three days for their flour. This mill is currently being restored and plans are in effect to make a museum of it. (Incidentally the Historical Society would appreciate the loan or gift of old historical papers, furniture, and other materials. Donors will of course be credited for their contributions.)

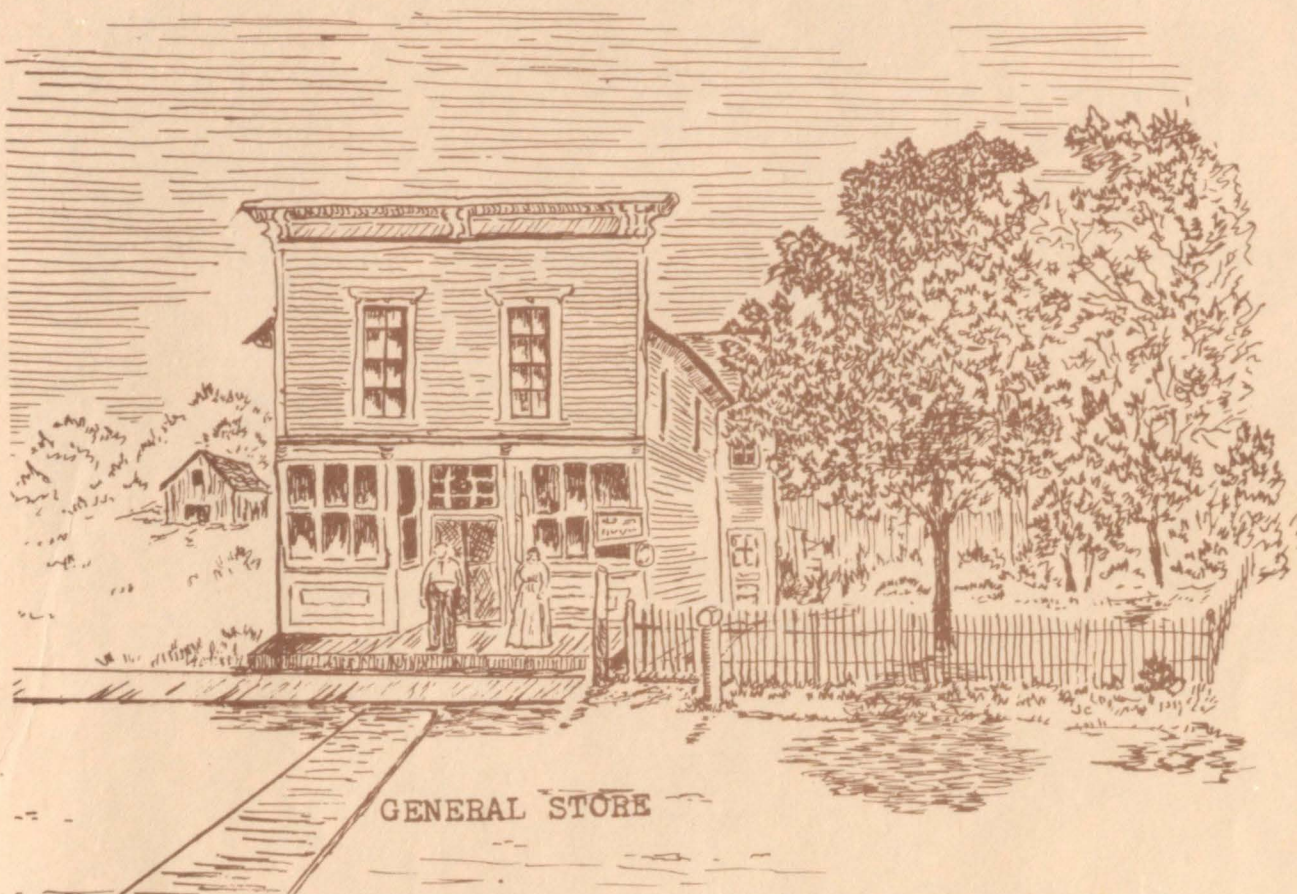
Gradually houses began to spring up in the vicinity of the mill, and Woodvale, as it came to be known, became a community and it was a community in which John Wood would allow no liquor. It was many years before even the most reputable of taverns opened for business there, as during his lifetime John refused to mark out lots and sell them to developers.

John Wood and his descendants were responsible for several well known structures in Deep River, many of which are depicted here, including the homes of John's son, Nathan, which is a two-story red brick building that is very elaborately designed, grandson Henry, who lived in a plain two-story frame house, and his place of business, the General Store and Post Office, and great-granddaughter Olive Wood, who resided in a home of unusual contours with its elaborately trimmed gables, curved wing, and back addition.



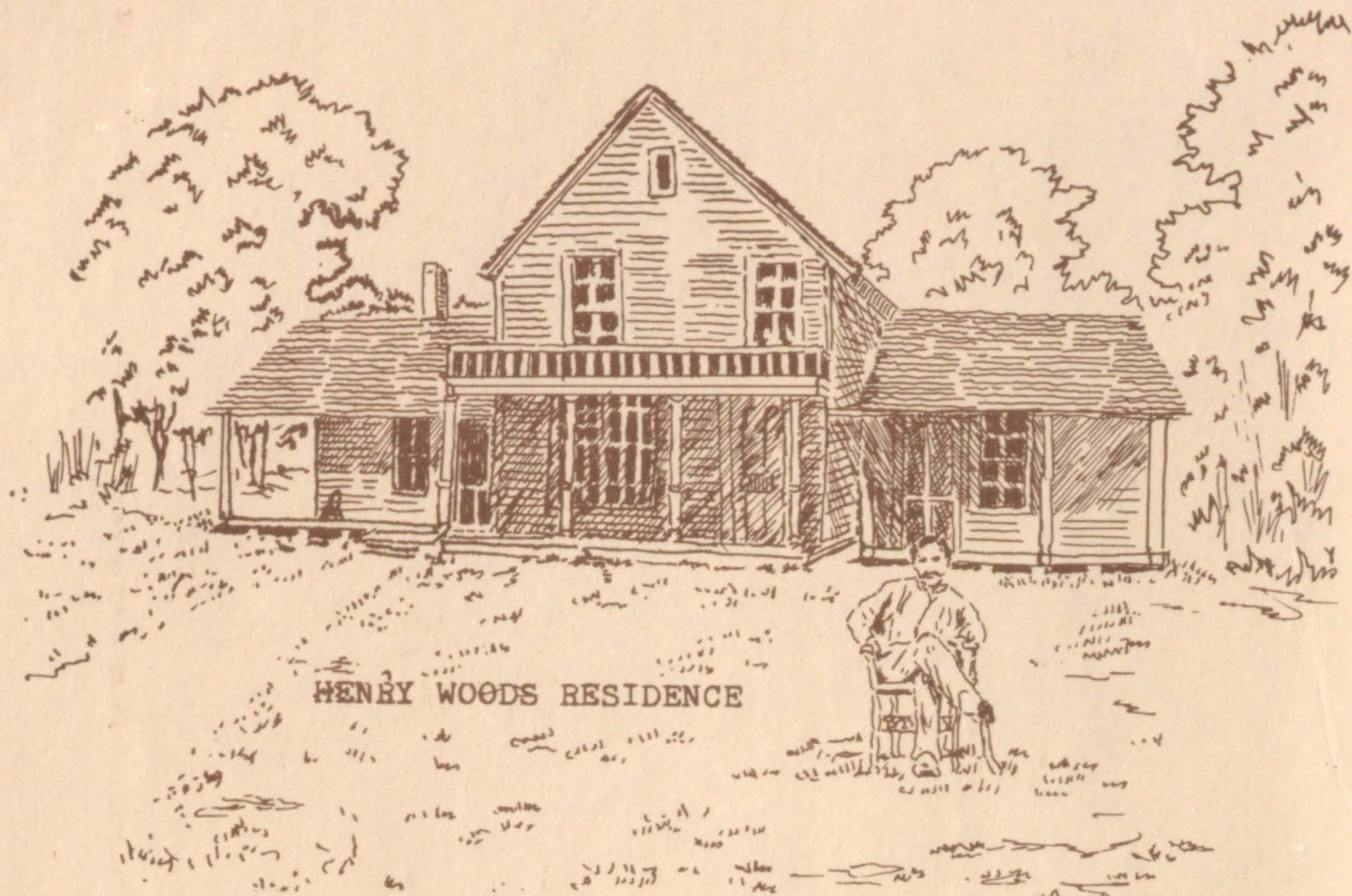




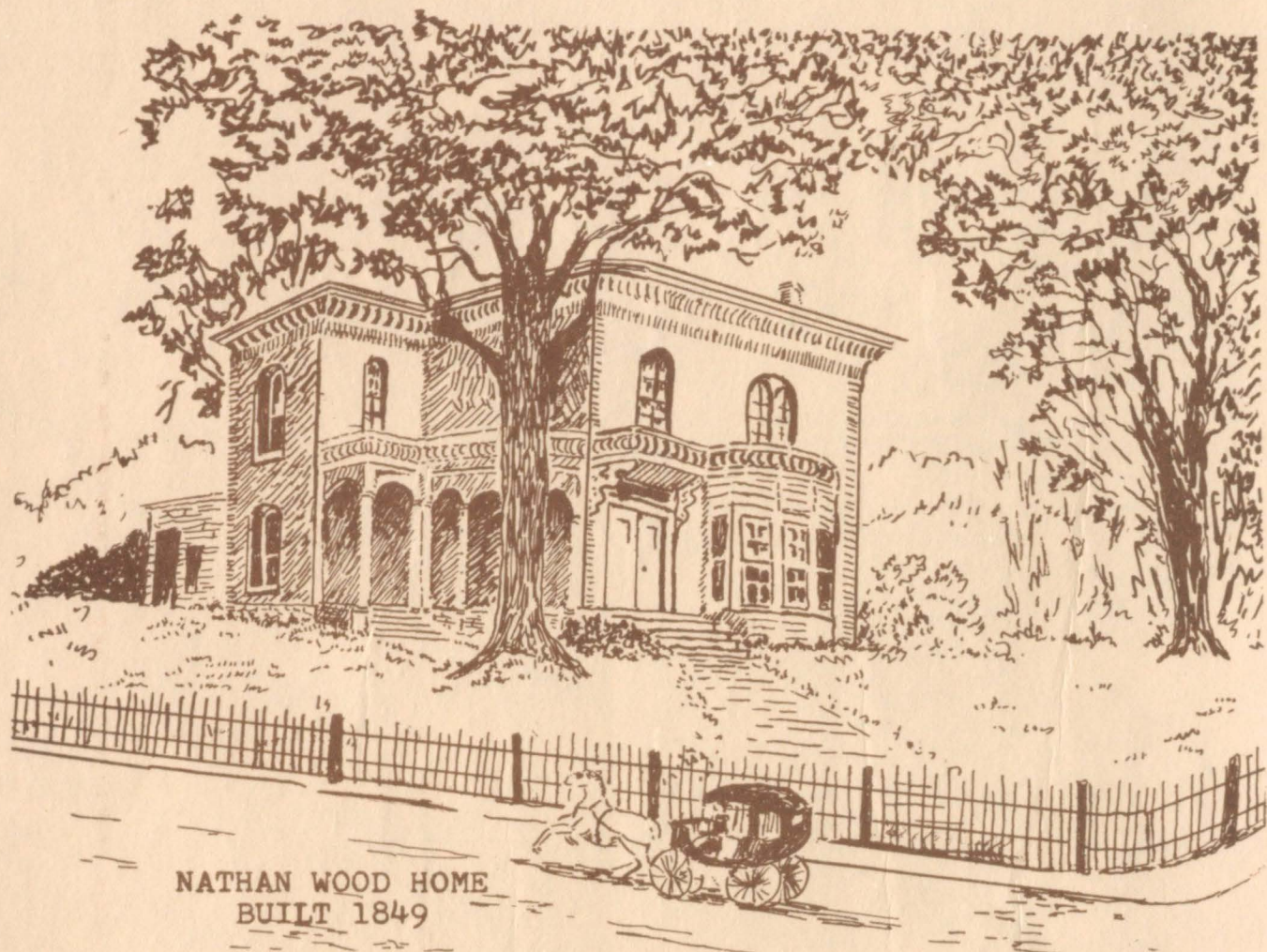


In 1840 there were some fourteen families in the area and a few businesses. There was, of course, John's mill, operated at that time by son Nathan. Another son, Augustus, ran a general store, and John's son-in-law, Dr. Vincent, was the village doctor and druggist. A blacksmith shop run by William Waldeck and shoe repair shop completed the picture. The village even had a schoolhouse which unfortunately burned and was not rebuilt. Several of these businesses can be seen in the accompanying illustrations. Also pictured is the Christian Church built in 1900, that, although no longer in use, is expected to become part of the Museum. In fact, a motion is afoot to preserve the entire village intact as a living museum so rich is the collection of historical buildings that abound there.





HENRY WOODS RESIDENCE

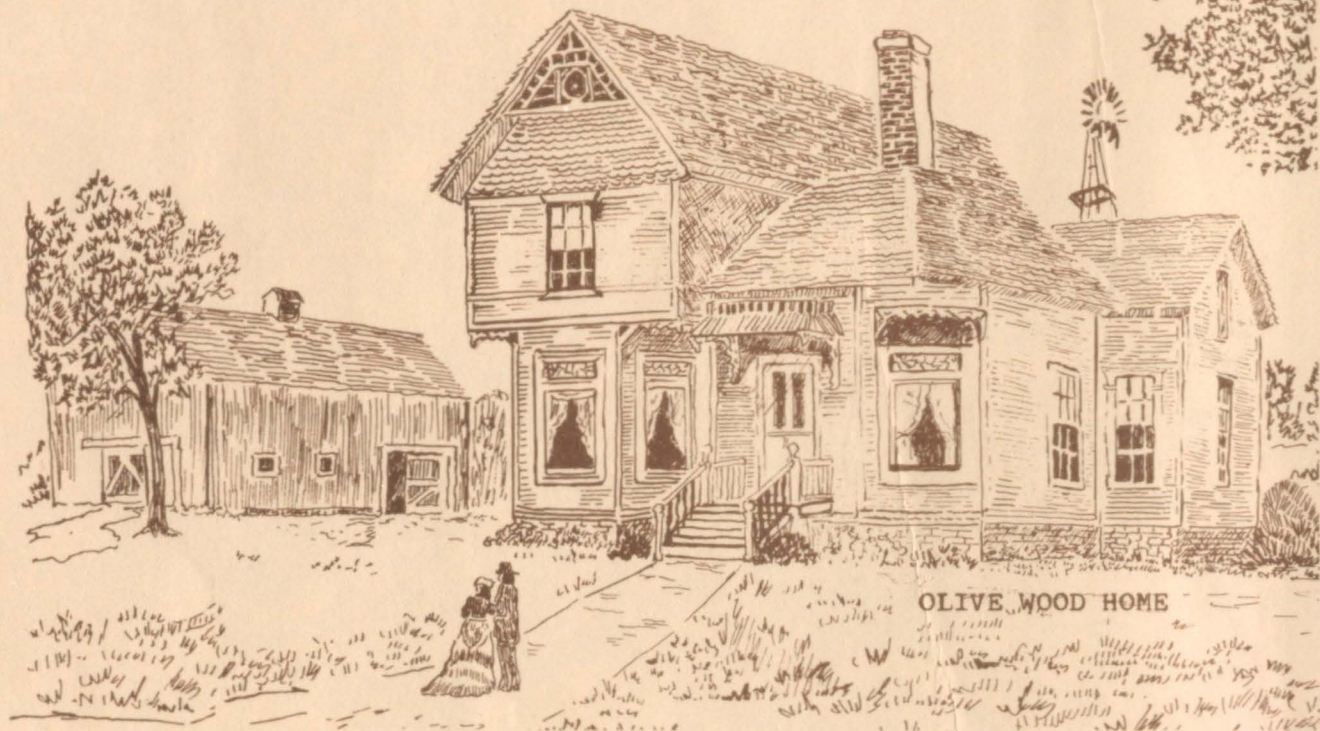
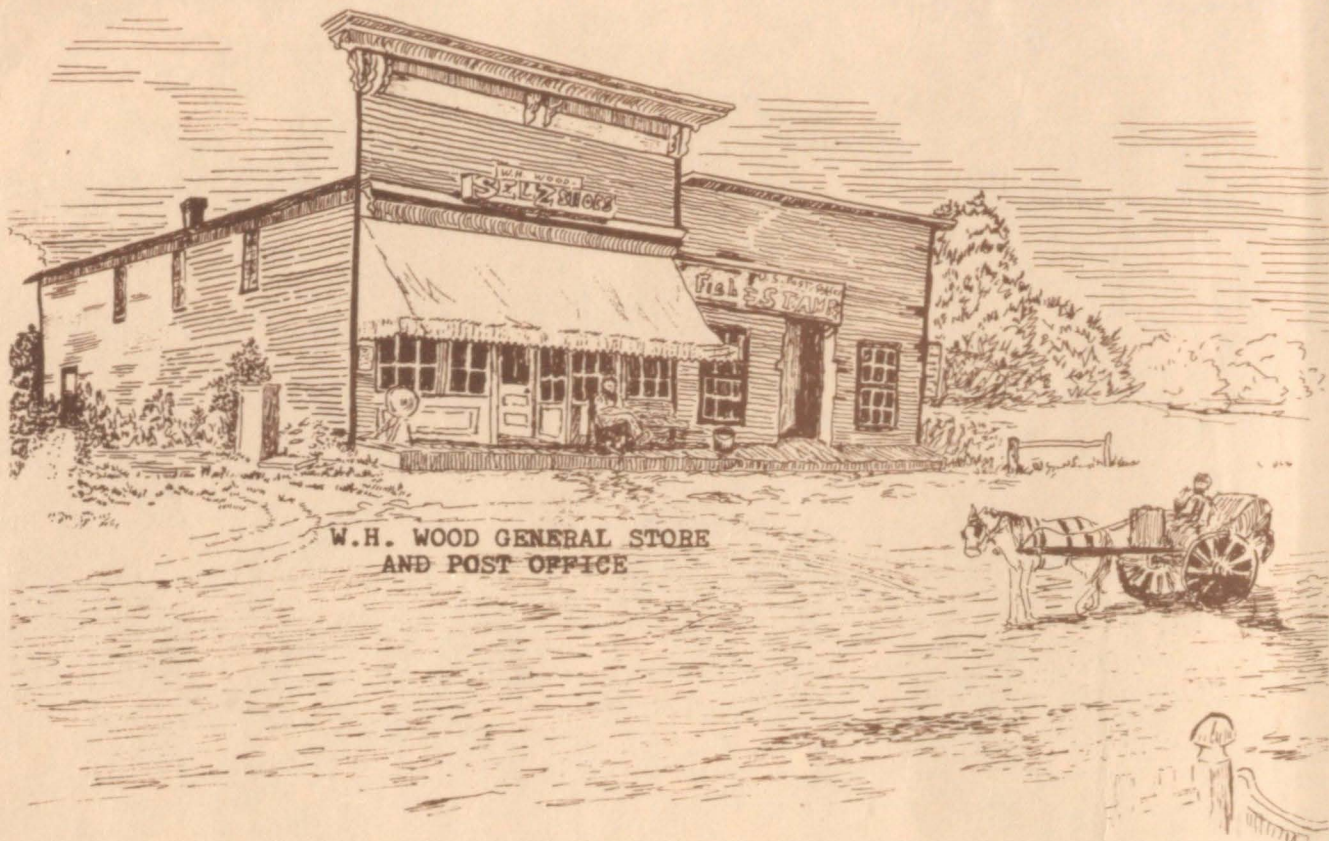


NATHAN WOOD HOME  
BUILT 1849











## BARTON HOUSE

Many of the older buildings in Ross Township have been remodeled to provide the comfortable conveniences of modern times like indoor plumbing and electricity. In the process oftentime conspicuous alterations are made on the exterior of the structure that blur the features that mark the building as belonging to another time. The Barton House located just west of the fire station on 73rd Avenue is an example of a remodeled house in which the changes are not obtrusive. When once the roof was hipped and supported a small cupola, it is now gabled and comes down lower on the sides. A dormer was added to provide more room, and small paned windows have been replaced with larger ones.

The builder of this house, Hiram Barton, was an unusual and most unforgettable man. Born in Cass County, Michigan, in 1839, he came to this county in 1848 with his family. Hiram's father, the Reverend Charles Barton, was a circuit rider and shoemaker. The former occupation paid only when church stewards solicited in behalf of the preacher and even then payment was often in the form of crops, not cash. To eke out a living, Charles operated a farm (located on Mississippi near Route 30) in Ross Township with the help of his growing sons in whom he instilled high moral principles and a religious conviction that would sustain them the rest of their lives.

Young Hiram remained on the farm until his marriage to Martha Boneys, at which time he apprenticed himself to a carpenter, and three years later, having learned the trade, he contracted on his own for construction of houses and other buildings and for repair jobs. He was to work at this trade for twenty three years.

In 1862 at the first firing of a gun on Fort Sumter he laid aside his hammer and saw and enlisted in the Co. N. 99th Indiana Volunteers. During his three year absence his youngest of two children, a son, died.

Upon his return in 1865 he was elected Township Assessor, an office he held for the next nine years. This was the start of a series of public posts he was to occupy over the next forty or so years including an appointment as Justice of the Peace, made in 1903 by the Honorable Board of Commissioners. He also has the distinction of having been elected the first president of the "Old Settlers Association."

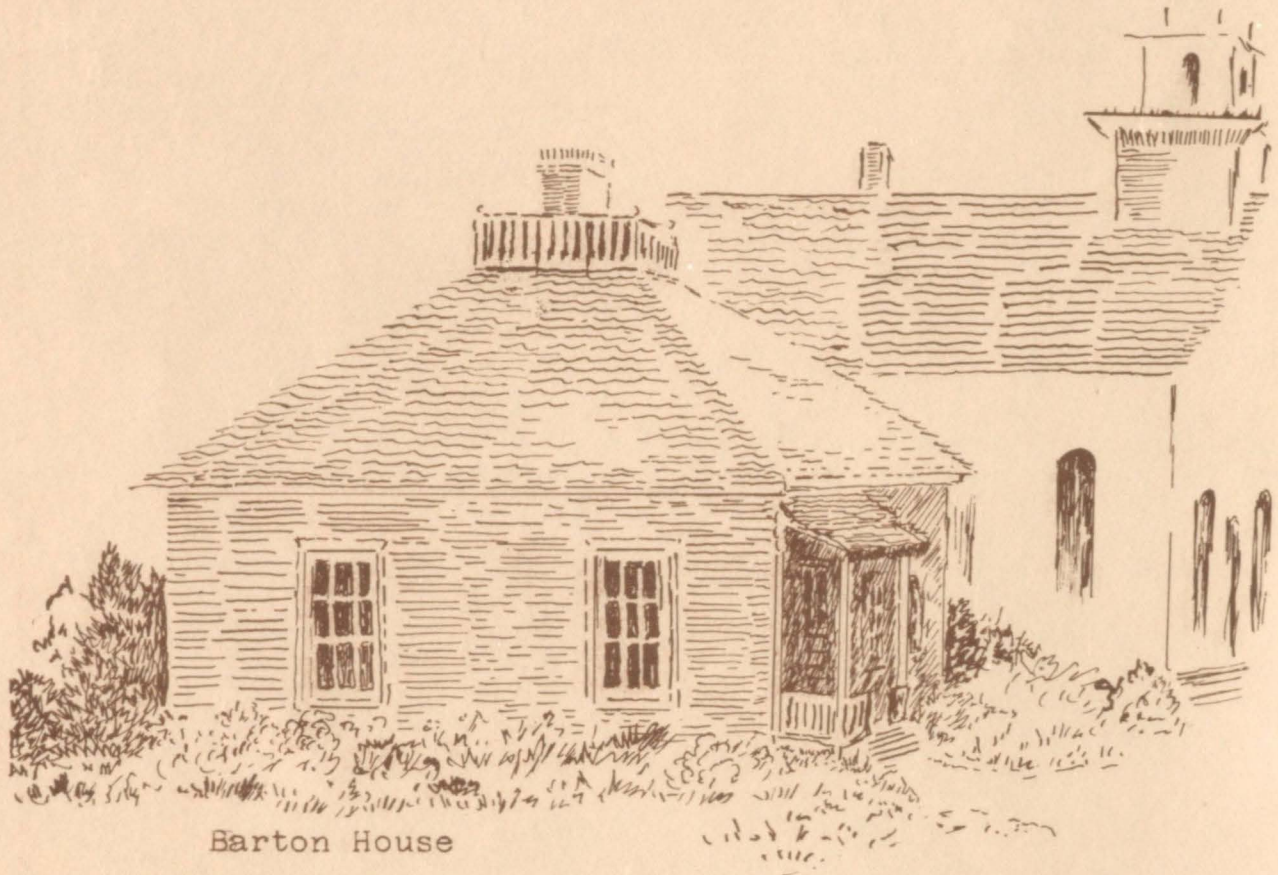
To Hiram as to his father before him, religion was a twenty-four hour a day, seven day a week pursuit. As a man of high moral conviction, he lived his beliefs and lent his



services zealously to the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was especially dedicated to the Sunday School program, having taught a class of eight young boys when Hiram himself was only eleven years old.

For several years he was the sole male member of the congregation. He led the choir in song and "sang beautifully for a man." Hiram's "Praise The Lord" was always distinctly heard at the end of each prayer. Eventually his efforts and enthusiasm were rewarded with a license to exhort granted by Reverend Clifton of the Methodist Episcopal Church of this area in 1876. In 1902 his life's dream was realized: he was given a local preacher's license.

Kindly, considerate Hiram who, in his later years wore a snow white beard, is remembered as a man of high integrity and marked generosity. It is highly fitting that this man who spent his whole life in an effort to be close to his Creator would choose to build his home so near a House of God, the old Methodist Church, now the fire station.





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Vice-President: H. Crandall

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Treasure : Howard Reder

Founder: Paul Tully

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